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ALTIMA
the Sword Princess

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XIII

Yukiya Murasaki

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ファミ通文庫

Altina the Sword Princess

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by Yukiya Murasaki

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覇剣の皇姫
アルティーナ
XIII
ALTINA
the Sword Princess



帝国元帥
アルディーナ

読書狂の軍師
レジス

「うっ……?
トウシ?」

「ここ最近の第四軍の活躍は、
投資した側からすれば
“大当たり”
の類いだ」

南部の女狐
エレアノール

ティラソラヴェルデ家息女
ルノワール

最近は、がんばって勉強して
“お金の大切さ”を学びつつある
アルディーナだが、投資にまで話が及ぶと、
ぽかんと不思議そうな顔をするばかりだった。

「私が**好き**」と言ったから、
レジスさんが悩んで
しまっているみたいで」

アルティーナが固まった。

「……はあ？」

アルティーナの侍女
クラリス



タン！

壁際に立てた甲冑に、ぼつんと穴が空く。

人が着ていたなら、心臓を貫かれて絶命しただろう。

エリックは素早く弾丸を詰め替える。

タン！

今度は、甲冑の額に穴が空いた。

おおお……と、見ていた者たちから、どよめき上がる。

帝国第四軍銃士
エリック

ALINA

the Sword Princess

"I trust you" Alina
bibliophagical
difficulties to



Prologue: Negotiations with Eleanor

Imperial year 851 August 23rd—

In the plains near the city of Wal Allen, 30 Li south of the capital Versailles.

The plains were bathed in the light of the setting sun.

A laced parasol flew into the sky.

The little girl who was just holding the parasol made a face on the verge of tears.

"Ah—....."

Eleanor patted her head.

"Don't worry about it, Renoir. Are you hurt?"

"....."

The little girl nodded.

Regis already investigated the background of the Tiraso Laverde house, so he knew that was the name of their third daughter.

— So this girl isn't a servant, but her younger sister.

Did she brought her sister to take care of her... Or was it easier to teach her all sorts of things by keeping her close.

The Tiraso Laverde Marquis house was a wealthy merchant in the south.

Regis said:

"Let us help you retrieve your parasol."

"Sorry about that, Regis."

"Not at all... Let's head into the tents. Looks like this negotiation will take some time."

She followed with a nod.

The little girl Renoir followed too.

Regis asked a soldier on standby to get the parasol.

There was a table and six chairs in the temporary tent.

Regis pulled the chairs and ushered Eleanor and her sisters to their seats.

This much courtesy was expected of the men from the Belgaria empire.

Even though they had a patricichal society, everyone was educated strictly from young to show chivalry towards women.

The only ones in the tent were Regis, Eleanor and Renoir.

"... Alright then, what is the current situation?"

"It all started after the end of the High Britannia war. When the previous emperor passed away."

Eleanor spoke with the tone of a man. This must be due to the fact that business, politics and military affairs in the Belgaria empire doesn't involve women at all, so she had to match men at least in tone.

"After he passed... Hmm..."

Regis recalled that period of time.

It was in June.

Less than 3 months had passed, but it felt like 3 years because so many things happened in between.

"Emperor Latreille... He was still the Field Marshal back then. He issued an order through the Ministry of Military Affairs. In short, he want us to give him money."

"... Taxes huh? Did he give anything as compensation?"

"None, this tax is levied in the name of the war with High Britannia. Compared to the west and central, the south were relatively unscathed, so they want us to provide assistance in the form of funds."

"... I see."

That's not unreasonable— Regis thought.

Not just war, if some other place suffer floods, droughts or plagues, it was common for other places to provide support.

Only big countries with vast lands could do that.

Eleanor sighed.

"I think providing relief for places affected by the war was the right thing to do. We should do what we can to do. However, that's only if we ourselves aren't affected too."

"That's a given."

"Shortly after the order of the war tax came, we received the obituary of the Sixth consort Johaprecia's passing."

"Yes."

Johaprecia and the emperor were both assassinated by Latreille.

According to the Royal Chamberlain Beclard, the sixth consort was the one who started this.

Regis speculated.

"The consort hailed from the Estaburg Kingdom to the east, so the relationship between our countries plummeted."

"... The Belgaria empire had been at war with the Estaburg Kingdom for a long time, and we only had a peace treaty after the emperor's marriage with consort

Johaprecia. A battle even broke out at the borders some days ago."

Regis received the report from the Seventh Army and Black Knights at the Eastern Front.

They won the battle of Fort Hauport, and the commander there sent a thank you letter.

But even so, Regis felt guilty about it.

The commander of Fort Hauport was the granddaughter of the late commander of the Seventh Army, Lieutenant General Bargesonne.

He died in the battle of Lafressange against the High Britannia army some time ago.

Back then, Regis was watching from behind as the strategist of the Beilschmidt Border Regiment.

— I did nothing to save him.

Regis was filled with self reproachment.

If he negotiated a better strategy before the battle, things would have been different. Regis still thought that way.

Such tragedy had been repeating itself from a long time ago.

His proposed strategy being rejected led to Marquis Thénézay death on the battlefield, everything started from there.

Could he have avoided sacrifices?

Minimized casualty?

Or the most basic thing, avoided pointless battle?

Regis regretted every battle he was involved in.

Eleanor asked:

"And so, what does the battle with the Estaburg Kingdom in the east have to do with the south— Sir Regis have you figured that out yet?"

"... Hmm, it's probably because Estaburg are linked by marriage to the Hispania empire to the south."

"You actually knew, as expected of Sir Regis."

"Well, this is a scene that will definitely be seen in any stage drama. After all, it would be a hassle to use the royals and nobles of Belgaria as reference, so there are many script writers who would rather use settings from other countries."

"Now that you mentioned it... I saw a show based on such a story before."

"That must be nice..."

Even though Regis had seen the scripts for shows before, he had not seen a performance as a member of the audience.

A ticket cost a week's salary for a Fifth Grade Admin Officer after all, and

wasn't a price poor peasants could afford.

Money wasn't an issue anymore, but he couldn't make time to watch shows leisurely now.

Eleanor continued:

"That Hispania Empire openly voiced their suspicion that consort Johaprecia was actually murdered."

"... Oh."

"Hispania didn't invade directly, but Etruria which received support from them did."

"I know about that."

Because the impact of the High Brittania army seizing Grebauvar city was too stunning, this news didn't make any waves at all. The Etruria Theocracy's army had already marched towards the southern strongholds back then.

— Back then, I thought they would be repelled easily.

However, the sturdy fort at the frontlines was lost, and even Regis was shocked by this.

"I don't really understand military matters... But in the Sixth army, the knight despatched from central is more capable than the commander. But that man had been transferred back to the First Army, which might be related to their failure."

"I see..."

"He is baron Zemoruto."

"Ahh!"

Regis slapped his knee.

That was the new knight commander of the First Army's White Wolves Knights.

It was true that he was extremely talented in both negotiations and on the battlefield. He would be a huge help as an ally.

"Sir Regis, do you know him?"

"... I met him on the battlefield before. He is a man I don't want to make an enemy of. By the way, you mentioned that he was recalled back from the south?"

"Yes... After he left, the Sixth Army lost in battle, and the great city of Sembione fell. That is an important trading city for us."

The topic was linked together.

The South was ordered to support the war zones, but they themselves were now affected by war too.

"... Explain the situation to the Ministry of Military Affairs... Ah, the Ministry had been dissolved, and the First Army is taking control. Have you explained the situation to them yet?"

"Of course. But they think that with the vast lands our family holds in the

south, just the area around Sembione being affected by the war won't be too much of a problem."

"Is that true? Please tell me frankly."

"If this goes on, our profits might go down by ten percent."

"... What an awkward number."

"It's fine if that was all. However, I can foresee them upping the ante if we agree to this tax. Unless the enemy is repelled, I can't agree to this."

"Hmm..."

Regis folded his arms in deep thought.

There was a high possibility of that being true.

Latreille wanted to expand the frontlines, and would even go as far as imposing taxes to achieve that goal.

Eleanor sighed.

"They can't even defend their territory and yet they are demanding money, they're like bandits. As the house leading the southern aristocrats, we can't accept the taxes imposed on us under such conditions— but even if we held out, our private army is still limited in number. In the worst case scenario, we might be branded traitors. Their first target might not be the invading Etruria, but us."

"... It is prudent to exercise caution."

Renoir who had been listening quietly suddenly looked outside the tent.

"Ah."

There seemed to be a commotion outside.

Regis stood up.

If it was just the soldier returning with the parasol, this was too much of a reaction.

"... What happened?"

"Hey!"

With imposing footsteps, the curtains of the tent were pulled up.

A young girl with red hair entered.

She glared with her sharp red eyes.

Her limbs with snow white skin comparable to porcelain would look like an art piece if they were still. But they were waving about crudely now, and a flawless fingertip— was pointing at Regis' nose.

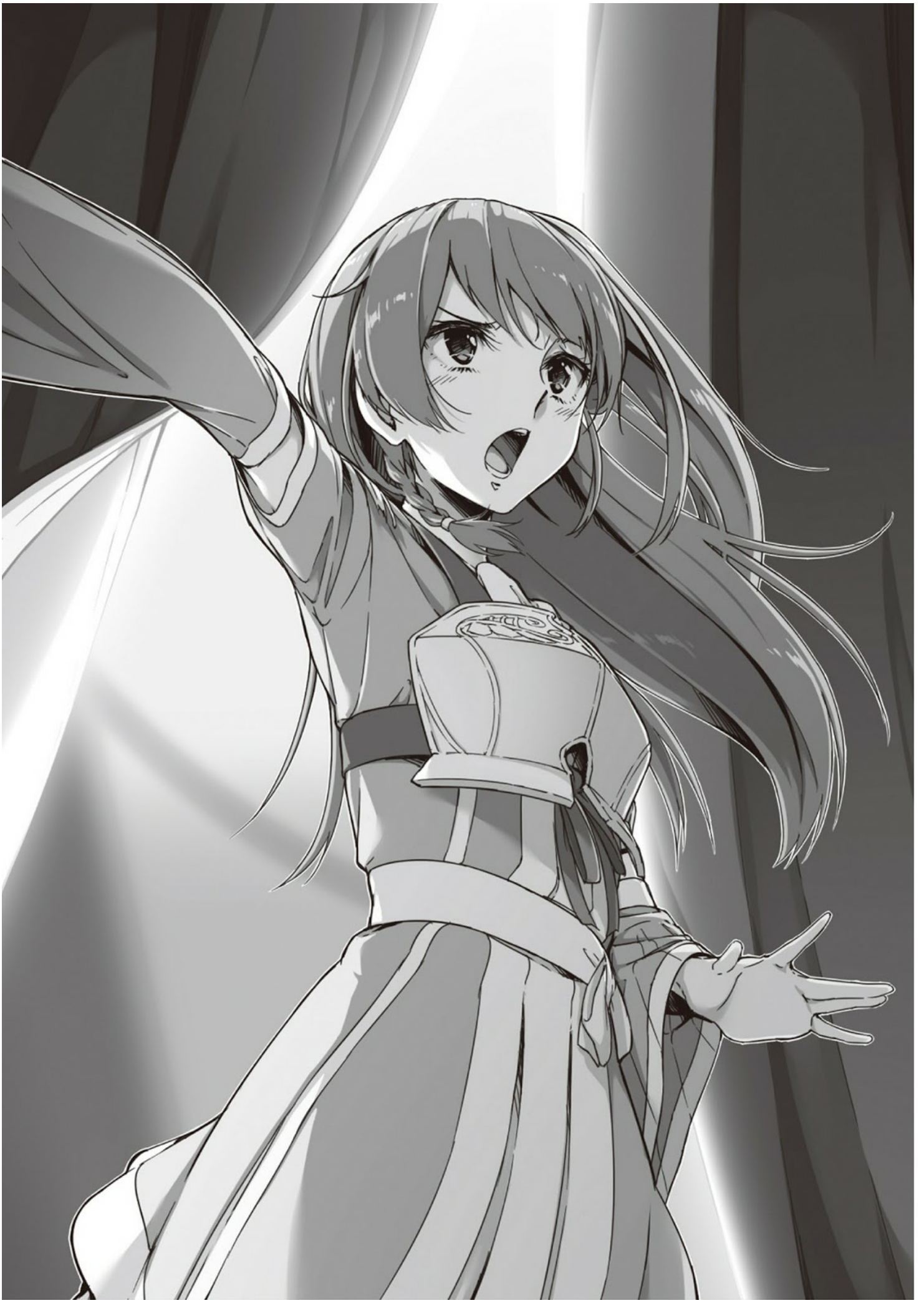
"Hey! Why didn't you call me, Regis?!"

"Your Highness!? What is this about...?!"

He would usually address her as Altina, but he would use honour speech like

‘Your Highness’ in the presence of outsiders.

Pfft, She puffed her cheeks.



"The two of you are meeting alone!"

"No no, her sister is here too."

Altina finally noticed Renoir, and her expression changed.

A smile appeared on her face.

She was unexpectedly fond of kids.

However, Renoir looked scared by her imposing entrance earlier.

Eleanor shrugged.

"Pardon me, she had not been educated on how to act in the presence of outsiders. Unlike Fanrine and me, she is more timid, which is a pain."

"She doesn't resemble the two of you at all."

"We have different mothers after all. Our personality differs too, probably because of our bloodline."

"Ohh, that's true."

Altina and her siblings had different mothers too, so she accepted this explanation quickly.

Well well, Eleanor brushed her dark hair.

"I'm not here to headhunt Sir Regis today. Well, I will welcome it if he wants to switch careers."

"Absolutely not!"

Altina slapped the table with a bang.

"But Sir Regis should be the one to decide right? Have you improved his benefits compared to before, Madam Généralissime?"

"Ughh..."

Before the topic heads down a weird direction, Regis interjected:

"I still have my aspirations and responsibilities, so I won't change job hop. My apologies, Princess... I thought you are tired from the long expedition, that's why I neglected to inform you, and took on this negotiation alone."

"Ah, yes, well... Just do what you usually do..."

Altina was at a loss for words.

One of the reason that she was unusually on guard, was because Eleanor left her lipstick mark on Regis' face during the Founding Day Festival in April.

But Regis had already forgotten about that.

After all, he had experienced life and death situations several times since then, and those intense memories had buried these trivial memories.

Eleanor nodded.

"Let's stop with the jokes... I'm requesting for assistance from the Madam Généralissime, and will make adequate payment... Anyway, please take a seat."

"Right."

Altina sat down beside Regis.

She took a deep breath, showed a serious face— then said something unexpectedly formal.

"First off, I want to thank everyone in the 《Gaillarde Garden's Alliance.》 for their support, you have my most sincere gratitude."

Regis opened his eyes wide.

"... Just like a real Princess."

"Hey?!"

"Ahh... you... No, I was surprised when Your Highness said something so Princess-like."

"This isn't the first time I said something so formal."

"That's true..."

"I also understand the flow of the funds. Since the Founding Day Festival, we have gone through several battles, and the Beilschmidt Border Regiment became the Fourth Army, and is now the Office of the Généralissime... During all these time, our supplies and salary had never stopped because of the support from the southern aristocrats."

Eleanor nodded.

"It is wonderful that you understand us."

When the army grew in scale, the Ministry of Military Affairs should increase the level of supply as well. But the number of soldiers under Altina increased too fast, and the Ministry couldn't keep up.

And they hired plenty of local staff and mercenaries too, and they couldn't

ask the country to foot the bill for these.

The Fourth Army only managed to fight for so long because of the funding support from the Southern aristocrats.

Altina lowered her head.

"But even so... I lost to Latreille."

"Please raise your head, Princess... It is true that Latreille had taken the throne, but we are still alive. It isn't over yet."

"Yes, that's right."

"We the 《Gaillarde Garden's Alliance.》 have no intention of blaming you. Compared to the past when we didn't have any military backing and had to give in to their one sided demands, the situation now is much better. It's all thanks to the Fourth Army's performance."

"Really?"

"Yes... Since we are supporting Your Highness, you wouldn't just turn a blind eye if we meet anything unreasonable right?"

"Of course."

"Because of our relationship with a powerful group, our business had been going smoothly all this time. We are very grateful for to you all. Given the outstanding results produced by the Fourth Army, it is like hitting the jackpot for us investors."

"Ehh...? Inn-vast?"

Altina had been learning about the importance of money recently, she had yet to venture into the topics of investment yet and looked lost.

It couldn't be helped, it would be a surprise if she knew.

Regis explained:

"The achievements of Your Highness had stabilized the position of your supporters— that's what she meant."

"Ahh, is that so? That's wonderful."

Eleanor smiled.

"I'm hoping that you all can keep this up in the future too."

"I heard that the city in the South had fallen, how dire is the situation?"

We were just discussing this that— Regis said and brought the topic back on track.

"The Sixth and Eighth Army didn't even hesitate to retreat in the face of the Etruria Theocracy army's invasion. Sembione city thus fell into the enemy's hands. It is difficult for the Tirasio Laverde house to give their support under such circumstances, that's what she said."

Altina stood up.

"And the people in the city?!"

"... We have sent out scouts, but there isn't any detailed information yet."

Eleanor said:

"The Sixth Army's Viscount Dorval announced their retreat in advance, so the evacuation was completed without any issues. However, a lot of things such as crops and livestock were abandoned."

"Is that so."

Altina was still tense, but she calmed herself and sat down.

Regis thought:

— Speaking of which, Lord Eddie once served in the Sixth Army. Maybe he knows about Lieutenant General Trouvére. I will ask him later.

Their intelligence was still lacking.

The Sixth Army had garrisoned the southern frontlines for a long period of time without any outstanding battle records, so there wasn't any prominent

records that draws attention.

The commander wasn't invited during the emperor's coronation, which shows how the military and social world regarded him.

The problem probably lies with the existence of the Sixth Army. And Latreille seemed to have noticed that.

So what was his intention in dispatching Altina's unit there? Was it just to resolve the war in the southern front as soon as possible?

Or did he had something else in mind?

"... Looks like we have to continue gathering intel."

Regis muttered.

A woman's voice came from outside the tent.

"Pardon me Your Highness. The tea is ready."

It was Clarice.

She didn't use her usual cheerful tone, but the emotionless voice she used in front of strangers.

"Thank you for bringing it here. How about chatting over tea, Eleanor?"

"I will be honored to join Your Highness' tea party, there's no reason for me to reject."

The eyes of Renoir who had been listening quietly sparkled.

"... Tea party."

She said in a barely audible voice.

The thick reddish brown liquid shook in the tea cup.

It seemed that the tea leaves were of a more expensive variety today.

Just the smell made Eleanor lavish it with praise:

"As expected of Your Highness, this is top grade tea."

"Is that so?"

Altina took a sip.

Regis did too.

"....."

But he couldn't tell whether the tea was bad with his tongue.

Eleanor lift the cup to her eye level, and peer inside.

"Princess, do you know the cost of this tea?"

"Ehh? Well... It's not cheap. But adequate tea should be served when receiving important guest."

"Ahh, I'm not discussing something as uncouth as whether this is a waste. Or rather, high grade tea should be served exactly for occasions like this. I just want to point out— that the price of tea had risen recently. Do you know that these tea are worth their weight in silver?"

Regis spat out his tea on reflex.

Altina also frowned.

"It's that expensive?!"

"That is only for premium grade products of course. However, the price of lower grade goods are also rising. And that's because of the Hispania Empire."

Hmm? Altina tilted her head.

Regis answered on her behalf.

"... It's because of pirates. Since ages ago, the Hispania Empire would disguise their navy as pirates, and attack the merchant ships around the Belgaria empire and its neighbouring countries."

"These acts of piracy are becoming more frequent. Part of the reason was the boom in the High Brittania economy, which raise the values of commercial cargo. Another factor is the decrease in the number of Belgaria escort vessels."

"... We lost many of our ships after all."

Altina smashed her fist onto the table.

"How despicable of them to rob merchant ships!"

"That's the style of that country. Ambushing people like bandits."

"That's going too far!"

"To the foreigners. The locals sees them as a righteous charitable group of gentlemen. I had never met any Hispanian like that... Maybe because I'm from Belgaria."

"Mmuu—"

Altina pouted.

Regis had such rumours before.

"... The steamship in Belgaria will be completed this year. Except for the steam engine, most of the structure is similar to sail ships anyway. Commerce would be tough before we amass a significant number of ships, but the situation at sea will turn stable shortly after that."

"How long would that take?"

"Hmm... It will take about three years to gather the numbers... But if we increase the alert level, we can decrease the number of pirates attack. We can probably see results by the end of next year."

"Hmmm... it's a good chance to sell the tea while its price is high. It's value will plummet after the sea trade stabilize again."

"Now isn't the time for business negotiations."

"No, that's not my point. I want to say that the sea is dangerous now. If our land trade routes gets blocked by the Etruria Theocracy, then it will be a serious problem."

"We will take care of the land routes. That's why we are here."

"I will be looking forward to it. After all, there are some nobles aligned with the 《Gaillarde Garden's Alliance.》 proposing that we deflect to the Hispania Empire."

"... That will really be a handful."

That would literally be treason.

However, the enemy had the support of a neighbouring nation, so this war wouldn't be settled easily this time.

Regis asked again:

"... Can you pass a message to everyone in the alliance? Généralissime Argentina will repel the invaders from the south as soon as possible. She won't let you wait long."

"I understand. Since Sir Regis says so, everyone will definitely accept it."

"I hope you are placing your trust in the Princess, and not me..."

"Fufu... Well, it's the same."

With the negotiations done, Eleanor relaxed and leaned onto her chair and sighed.

Regis placed his hand on his lower lip.

"There's one more thing. Regarding the tax levied by Emperor Latreille... If you can going to pay, can you propose paying goods in lieu of money?"

"Ohh... you mean using wheat as a substitute?"

"Use rifles. His Majesty Latreille is thinking about the mass production of rifles. And it needs to be fast and large in quantity."

Eleanor showed an intrigued smile.

And leaned forward.

"I never thought that we the southern new nobles will be involved with military secrets— Since Sir Regis mentioned it, it must be important. Pray tell me the details."

"The new rifles of the Belgaria Empire, the 《Fusil 851》 is a replica of High Brittania Kingdom's 《Snider Rifle》. That isn't a secret kept under wraps."

These rifles came to the Belgaria Empire with the invading High Brittania army, and several thousands of them were seized by the Empire.

"Please wait a moment." — Regis said as he took out a High Brittania made rifle from his luggage.

He placed the rifle onto the table.

"It's more complicated than a sword... But look here. The edge of this part is distorted right? That's because it's made by pouring molten steel into a mould. If we dismantle this rifle and use clay to cast its shape, we can replicate it easily."

Eleanor studied the rifle seriously.

"Hmm..."

If they actually took up the job of manufacturing, they should be able to get the blueprints of the 《Fusil 851》.

"Instead of paying taxes, how about building such a factory instead? The first batches of the rifles might be collected as taxes, but you would have the means to keep producing and selling more to the military."

"Hmmp... This is an interesting topic, but I don't think the aristocrats in central will let such a privilege slip away."

"Actually, it will be hard for the aristocrats in central to interfere. After all, the

iron around the capital is monopolized by the blacksmith guild in Rouen city. If they earn the ire of the guild, the first rate blacksmiths might decline to do business with them."

Both swords and armour were forged by blacksmiths, and they were needed for continued maintenance and adjustments. If their relationship with the blacksmiths soured, it would be hard for the aristocrats to maintain their private army.

"Won't it be better to ask the blacksmiths to forge them?"

"If the grand nobles in central want a share of the profit in rifle productions, they will do just that. But if they engaged the blacksmith to do so, the unit price of the rifles will be very expensive. The quality will be very high... But it's not worth it."

"Ohh?"

"Only the key components of the rifles need to be made with precision. But all first rate blacksmith have their pride as professionals, and will polish every nook and cranny of the rifle. People who don't strive for perfection can't open a workshop in Rouen."

"You actually know such details."

"My brother-in-law is a blacksmith in Rouen city after all."

Eleanor nodded.

"Hmm... which means that the blacksmiths in Rouen will craft the top quality products, and we will make money with sub-par goods?"

"No no no... the goods have to meet a certain standard. The lives of the soldiers and citizens are depending on it after all."

"I'm just kidding, we will definitely make products of acceptable quality."

"I will be counting on you. It will be best if it is plain without any decorations."

"That's not the style of Belgaria though."

"It's a replica of High Britannia in the first place... Besides, the fundamental technology was based on the Germanian Federation which focus on efficiency. Records states that it wasn't accepted by the king of the original inventor, and after a limited test quantity was used to suppress a rebellion, it was leaked to

other countries..."

At this point, Altina said:"You're getting off topic again."

Regis got back on track and continued:

"Another thing, the 《Fusil 851》 requires rubber. Top quality rubber can only be obtained in the south. For the nobles who want to take on the manufacturing of rifles, this is a great advantage."

"Indeed."

Maybe this was one of the reasons why Latreille sent Altina's unit to the south. If the supply of rubber got blocked, it would affect the production of the new rifles.

Regis concluded:

"... This is the proposal I thought up as a bargaining chip. I assure you that we will take back the city as quickly as possible. I would like Ms Eleanor to negotiate with Emperor Latreille on the productions of the rifle."

She showed a smile that had a subtle meaning behind it.

"Securing business deals from royals and nobles is my specialty, just leave it to me— but Sir Regis, you omitted the most crucial part correct?"

"... Ehh?"

"What do you stand to gain from this, Sir Regis?"

Oh, I see—

Altina made such a face. It was true that Regis had not told her that yet.

Eleanor lowered her voice.

"Do you want us to sell the rifles in secret?"

"No, there will definitely be many inspectors keeping watch in the factory. Besides, like I mentioned earlier, it's not hard to make rifles."

If he really needed rifles, he just needed to start a factory himself. Although there wasn't any point in doing that.

She fell into deep thought.

Her posture was as beautiful as a painting. As expected of a beauty.

"... I have some idea of what you wish to accomplish... but this isn't really necessary right?"

"Well, just executing this plan alone is pointless after all."

"Hmm... so you do have something else in mind."

"That's right... But if the Tiraso Laverde clan don't take the rifle production contract, I will need to use the back up plan, and fulfill other conditions..."

Surprisingly, Eleanor didn't pursue the matter.

"Fufu... it's best to have less people know the plan. Just tell me the rest when I need to know."

"Thank you very much for your kind understanding."

Altina looked over with a serious expression.

"So Regis has not given up yet, and is still thinking about many things."

"... You also haven't given up too, right?"

"Of course!"

She puffed out her chest as she said that.

Eleanor stood up with a smile.

She bowed towards Altina.

"Please bring peace to this land."

"I will do my best! Regis is here, so it will definitely be fine!"

It was a truly heavy burden, but saying that he didn't have confidence won't help the situation at all. So Regis held his peace.

He never had confidence in the first place.

However, Regis learned after experiencing many battles that having a timid attitude was pointless.

Or rather, the most important thing to do in his position was to let others trust him.

— I can't fail again.

When they left the tent, Regis called out to Eleanor who was walking in front of him:

"Oh right... there's one more thing."

"Hmm?"

"Actually, there's a guest I want you to meet."

"Who might that be?"

"She is Elise Archibald, do you remember her?"

"Ohh... so she's back."

Eleanor narrowed her eyes slightly.

Moments later, she conversed shortly with Elise...

To carry out the plan as quickly as possible, Eleanor set off for the capital immediately. Her goal was to negotiate with the new Emperor, Latreille.

The Fourth Army linked up with the unit garrisoned in the south.

They reached the consensus that it was safer for Elise to stay with them as Regis' guest for now.

Chapter 1: The Sixth and Eighth Army

The Fourth Army started advancing again.

Regis got on the carriage.

And Clarice sat opposite him as usual.

When there weren't any outsiders, she would become very chatty.

And would often tease Regis.

But these few days, she spent most of her time just looking at Regis with a smile.

Regis asked exasperatedly:

"... Erm... What is it? The atmosphere feels different from usual."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Are you mistakened, Sir Regis?"

"... I hope that is true."

"You said the atmosphere feels different... Maybe it's Sir Regis' mindset that has changed?"

"... That may be so."

It happened several days ago.

When he finally had the chance to have a proper conversation with Clarice.

Back then, she told Regis "I like you", and that wasn't a lie or a joke. Regis

didn't think too much about it back then, and thought she was just teasing him for fun again...

— But what if that was a sincere confession?!

No no no... Regis shook his head in his heart.

It was hard for him to imagine that anyone would ever love him.

But if that was so, then what did Clarice actually mean?

"Hmm..."

Regis rested his head on his hands and pondered.

He couldn't calm down.

If he had more information about the southern front, he could formulate battle plans. But unfortunately, they were still in the intel gathering stage.

The carriage door was knocked.

He looked out the window, and saw Altina troddling over on her horse.

"Can I bother you for a moment?"

"Ah, alright."

Regis opened the small windows at the front of the carriage, and told the driver to stop for a while.

Altina smiled awkwardly:

"Carriages sure are nice. You can reach such speed just by spinning the wheels around."

"Madam Généralissime, please don't say something so childish alright?"

"Your Highness...?"

Not just Regis, she was willing to listen to Clarice's advice now. That shows how much she had grown.

After handing her horse to a subordinate, Altina got on the carriage and sat down beside Clarice.

"Eddie will be coming later."

"Lord Eddie will be joining us?"

"He said that we should have a discussion before we meet up with the Sixth Army."

"I see. I wanted to ask him some things too."

"Then like usual, let's set up tent in the evening, then go to sleep after finishing dinner—"

"... Yes."

Altina will practice with Eddie before and after meals, and this part was probably included in “after dinner”.

Regis and Clarice suddenly locked gazes.

"....."

"....."

They looked at each other without saying a word.

Altina swiveled her head between the two of them.

"Hmm—? What’s going on? This feels strange?"

She was sharp.

There wasn’t any basis for this, but she sensed the stiff atmosphere.

At least for Regis, his feelings had changed subtly after that incident a few days ago.

Clarice smiled awkwardly:

"After hearing me say “I like you”, Regis has been troubled all this time."

Altina turned stiff.

"... Hah?"

It was a bit scary.

Pfft, Clarice said with a laugh:

"Ara ara, Your Highness is showing an expression I have never seen before because of Regis... I feel a little envious."

"C-Clarice, are you serious?!"

"What do you mean?"

"R...Regis, the things about him! You I-I-like..."

"Of course it's true, Princess. In the entire Belgaria empire, would anyone hate Sir Regis? Ah, I don't know what His Majesty Latreille thinks. What about you, Your Highness?"

"Ehh? Well..."

"Choose either "like" or "hate", okay?"

"Then, li... Hey, why are there only two choices?!"

Clarice sighed and drooped her shoulders.

"Hah... My Princess has become smarter."

"Why do you look so disappointed?!"

"Well, I like the way the Princess is right now too."

Regis who was sitting opposite them realized after hearing their conversation.

"... Could it be, when you said "I like you" to me, you mean it the same way as liking Altina?"

Clarice said with a giggle:

"Ara ara, Sir Regis, isn't that obvious?"

The breath he had been holding in these few days could finally be exhaled.

"T-That's right~"

Altina had an uneasy face.

"Is it true? Clarice, is what you said true?"

"How could I ever lie to the Princess?"

"You did trick me plenty of times."

"... Your Highness sure is smart. Yup."

"Don't try to muddle it, Clarice. Is it really really true?"

Yes—, Clarice tilted her head with a smile. Her expression made it hard to discern what she really thought.

"To be frank— I think Sir Regis is a charming man. He is the hero who saved the Belgarian Empire and a First Grade Admin Officer who is a commoner. He will definitely make it into the history books. After becoming the strategist in the Office of the Généralissime, his authority is on par with a minister's aide."

"Erm, yes."

Altina looked even more anxious.

Even Regis couldn't sit still after hearing all that.

Clarice said seriously:

"However, there isn't any woman who will be willing to spend her days with a man who spends the majority of his salary on books."

""Ughh...""

Altina and Regis moaned at the same time.

Clarice said with no room for debate:

"I like Sir Regis. I like him very much. It's true. But it is different from the "like" that Your Highness is thinking about. I have my own plans for the future too. I'm a bit skeptical about an impoverished life surrounded by books and not knowing what tomorrow will be like."

Regis' head bowed in a slump.

"... I have nothing to say about that."

"Ah,ahaha... Well, Regis is really a handful!"

Altina laughed dryly.

It felt suffocating.

To fan away the heavy air, Altina quickly switched topics.

"Hey, Clarice, what about your plans for the future? Do you have an ideal type of man?"

"An ideal type huh... Probably someone with a lot of savings."

"E-Ehhh..."

Altina opened her mouth wide.

Regis almost rolled onto the floor.

— So this is reality.

Even if he was revered as the saviour of the nation, and advanced his career enough to make history, no woman would even consider spending their future with a bibliomaniac like him who spent all his time and money on books.

"... I see, I already know."

The corners of Regis' eyes turned moist as he slowly opened a book.

As expected, this was the only thing for him.

He just needed to read books. They would let him forget the sadness of the present, the unease of the future and the regrets of his past.

Fufu, the world of books sure is wonderful!

"Regis! Don't start reading books in the middle of a conversation, hey?!"

Altina said through gritted teeth. But even so, this was the only thing Regis could do to soothe and calm his mind.

"....."

"What are you mumbling!?"

"You're actually reading it out loud...?!"

Clarice watched the rowdy two with a smile.

Eddie also got on the carriage.

He was Duke Eddie Fabio de Balzac.

The head of the clan bestowed with an 《Emperor's blade》, he was armed with the 《Defendre Sept》.

His hair was curly and messy, and he didn't look like a Duke, or even a career soldier at first glance.

He was even mistook for a mercenary or rookie, and voluntold to load the cargo.

And his personality was such that he would agree because he happened to be free.

"Yo, Regis! Huh, why are your eyes red?"

"Ah... Haha... I cried a little."

"Hmm? Well, never mind."

Eddie had a personality that didn't mind the details.

He sat beside Regis.

There were four people in the carriage— Regis, Altina, Clarice and Eddie.

"So, how goes the south?"

"Our messenger just returned."

After getting in touch with the Sixth Army, they had a firmer grasp on the situation there.

Regis laid a simplified map on the table inside the carriage.

"... The invading Etruria Theocracy army has 20,000 men. Seven forts of various sizes have fallen, and the southern base city Sembione fell into enemy hands a week ago."

The fortification of Sembione city was on the average level in the empire. So why did the Sixth and Eighth Army abandoned it so readily?

Eddie frowned.

"The enemy forces has quite a substantial number. If they already took the

city a week ago, won't they continue with the next step of their invasion plan?"

"That might be possible... But given how far they have invaded, it will make more sense to wait for a resupply there. After all, they also need rest."

"Once they are ready, they will hit the next stronghold."

Regis nodded.

"Right now, the Sixth and Eighth army is garrisoned in Aroe Maroe City. There is a lake to its south and its walls are shorter, but it is built on a plain which makes it a good battlefield."

"You are planning to fight the decisive battle in Aroe Maroe City?"

"... There is a sturdier fort to the north... But if we pull our forces there, we will lose a third of the southern territory."

Altina tilted her head.

"When Grebauvar was seized, Regis wanted to pull our army back to a more

defensible position even if we would have lost our territory, right?"

"Yes. The fact is, the frontline is now the fort in front of Mordor city. We had already abandoned Grebauvar."

"Is this pacifism?"

"Erm, no... this has nothing to do with ideology, this is just the conclusion if we consider the most efficient methods available. After all, we don't need to garrison as many troops in an easily defensible position"

"Then why aren't we retreating to that sturdier fort to the north? Is it because of Eleanor's request?"

Regis shook his head.

"... The Tiraso Laverde clan is an important supporter of the Fourth Army. They did request many things from us. But I didn't pick Aroe Maroe City as the battlefield for the sake of recovering lost grounds quickly."

Altina and Eddie listened quietly.

And of course, Clarice did the same. She didn't interrupt this war conference.

Regis said:

"... The southern lands are a critical food production area for the Belgarian empire. It is still half developed, but its crops like wheat, corn and soy account for half of the empire's harvest."

"It's that much?!"

"... If we lose a third of the south, then it won't be any surprise if the price of wheat doubles. It's the same for lemon and oranges. Potatoes, tomatoes and corn from the New World grows fast too, but we would probably lose them all."

"Isn't that serious!"

"...Grebauvar city also has specialty products, so it's painful to let it go... But in this war, we can't afford to lose any land in the south."

"Yes! I understand! I will definitely recover these lands."

Altina clenched her fist.

Regis nodded.

"... With the huge increase in population, we are already facing a farmland shortage. In my humble opinion, we should stop the war and focus on developing the land for agricultural use."

Regarding this issue, Professor Brather's 《Southern Revolution》 included all the finer details.

Eddie shrugged.

"Well, Latreille will scold us if we pull back the frontlines any old how."

"Haha... That's true. When I proposed flooding Grebauvar city, he already nagged at me plenty."

It would be a serious problem if the southern frontlines were pulled back substantially.

They reached the consensus that they had to recover the territory.

Regis asked:

"Lord Eddie served in the Sixth Army before, correct?"

"Ah—... That was about half a year ago, when we were suppressing Earl Trosa's rebellion. It was terrible."

He said impatiently.

"The commander back then was Lieutenant General Bernard Jean de Dorval right? He was also the de facto commander."

In the noble's private army, a noble might be the commander in name, while another person proficient in military matters will command in his stead. This was a common practice.

"Yeah, but he was a Major General back then."

"It seems that until recently, he was assisted by his adjutant, Lord Zemoruto."

"Hmm? I never met that guy before. Maybe he is the knight who was transferred over to replace me."

"Maybe. Well, let's leave that aside for now... Can you tell me about Lieutenant General Dorval? I want to use it as reference during negotiations and formulating battle plans."

Eddie shrugged.

"He attacked an enemy fort with mediocre fortification with three times their number. The rebellion which should have been suppressed in half a month got dragged to half a year without any results. That's the kind of commander he is."

Altina showed a loathsome expression like Eddie.

"Isn't that incompetence?!"

"I didn't contribute to the battle in all sorts of way too. Anyway, that Lieutenant General is timid and pessimistic. Even when a charge should be ordered, he would call for a retreat instead."

"How disgraceful!"

With performances like that, no wonder no one is willing to talk about him in the capital.

What the imperial citizens like to discuss are glorious victories.

And of course, crushing defeats could also spark off debate. But since there wasn't any information related to that, he probably didn't lose too many men.

Speaking of which, if he really lost a lot of soldiers, he couldn't have maintained the frontline for half a year.

"... Is he really just timid?"

An incompetent commander would lose the lives of his soldiers for nothing instead.

According to Regis' investigation, the Sixth Army's fighting strength was constantly at the 20,000 mark, and there weren't any large scale recruitment

drives to bolster their numbers.

Which meant that despite the lack of victory, there also weren't any losses.

He thought off handedly:

"... From the battle records in recent years, the Sixth Army has a survival rate far higher than other units."

The amount of rain during the rainy season in the south was staggering.

Not only did the wet ground become hard to traverse, the amount of water in the river also increased, and it took an entire day to cross the river.

The Fourth Army had brought a large amount of supplies with them in accordance to the Sixth Army's request. They lost their resources along with their base. They also had many refugees in tow.

Even the supplies in the base behind them were limited, a symptom of

terrible planning. But they wouldn't have lost if their planning was good in the first place.

And so, the Fourth Army brought a larger than usual load of logistics to the south.

Two weeks later—

The walls of Aroe Maroe City appeared before the Fourth Army.

Its stone walls were erected on the grassy plains.

The city was about the size of Grebauvar city and was considered massive for a regional province.

The puddles on the ground reflected the clear blue sky.

Large chunks of white clouds hung above the horizon.

It was late morning, there was no trace of the downpour earlier, and the sky was completely clear.

This region had high temperature and low humidity, which made for a fair climate. But after it rains, it feels like a sauna.

You would sweat just from sitting around.

Altina who was riding alongside the carriage on her horse shouted:

"I can see it!"

Regis answered through the carriage's window:

"The south sure is vast. This journey took more time than a round trip from Fort Volks to the capital."

"We have to let the troops rest for a while—"

"Yes."

"Is Aroe Maroe City fine? Did Etruria seize it?"

"We already got in contact with them. The theocracy army is still in Sembione city, and shows no signs of movement. Their resupply is probably delayed because of the rain."

"Which means that they can't attack?"

"... If that happened, our imperial army will be the one attacking their stronghold, which will be even better for us."

"Is Sembione city easy to attack?"

"The theocracy army doesn't have any high performance cannons, so we can take down the walls by firing from afar. It will be a piece of cake."

"Ahaha."

"... The enemy should know the difference in the performance of our cannons. I think it's just a matter of time before they assault Aroe Maroe City."

"Will they bypass us from another route?"

"... If they did, we will just take down Symbione city and cut off their supply line. It will be even easier to defeat a starving army."

"You covered all the bases as usual—"

"This is... the basics in the Military Academy right?"

Regis spent a lot more time practicing fundamental swordsmanship compared to listening to lectures. His results were lackluster, so it was best not to bring it up.

No matter what, the Sixth and Eighth army were still there. With the reinforcement of the Fourth Army, the enemy couldn't ignore this stronghold and continue their invasion.

The Etruria Theocracy army will definitely attack Aroe Maroe City.

They reached the city gates.

As the messengers already made several trips to make status reports, the gate was already open when they reached it, so they didn't need to wait.

They entered the city through the wide open gates.

Altina was intrigued by the city walls.

"Ehh—... it's actually brown."

"Because the soil here contains malmstone. So the boulders dug up here are light brown—"

"Ah, there's a cat! It's white nya!"

"... Ah, yeah."

"It seems to be more agile than the cats from the capital."

"That's because the species is different. There's a book that studies cat. According to Professor Giga Domingo's 《In Search of Cats Overseas》, the cats from the south are closer to the originals. After all, cats are animals found in

tropical countries in the first place."

"I see—"

They passed through the gates.

All the buildings were built with light brown earth and stone, giving off a warm impression.

The newer structures were erected in the style of the Belgaria empire, with protruding windows and triangular roofs.

The older buildings had flat roofs and small windows, just like a warehouse.

The evolution of culture could be observed in this city. After all, this land wasn't part of the Belgaria empire a century ago.

With the main roads filled with twists and turns, it was both impractical and lacked aesthetics, making it hard to discern the intent of its architects, as if the city was built by many individuals naturally.

Not just the citizens, soldiers could be seen here too.

There were those who saluted at the sight of the Fourth Army, and those who hurriedly hid into the houses.

Altina frowned.

"Hmmm..."

"What is it?"

"Like what Eddie said, I don't feel any aura from them at all."

"... Did they neglect their training?"

Regis couldn't swing swords, wield spears or ride horses. So he couldn't tell the power levels of the soldiers no matter how much he observed the individual soldiers.

Altina commented:

"I don't think they are weak since there are few rookies. If I have to say, they are like veterans who are so familiar with war that they don't feel tense."

"... I see."

"We are already invaded, aren't they too relaxed about it?"

They even saw soldiers with bare upper bodies and faces red from drinking in the day.

Regis advised Altina:

"... That's how the regional units are. It's the Beilschmidt Border Regiment disciplined by the strict General Jerome that is special."

"Don't this mean that the commander here isn't nervous at all?!"

"... That is true."

They came to the building in the center of the city.

An orderly unit stood in formation before them.

"Ara, they are still disciplined soldiers here."

"... Are they the Eighth Army?"

Altina complimented them, but Regis head's remained tilted.

Was it because they were in a city? They weren't armed with lances, but had swords and shields instead. Although there was a need to switch out equipment depending on the situation, the popular weapons on the battlefield right now were lances that were taller than the user.

— In other words, the commander of the Eighth Army was an aristocrat from the west.

And their style was to place heavy emphasis on tradition.

Fortress city Aroe Maroe, Main hall.

Although the room was small, it was decorated with the vibrant colors of the Belgarian Empire, and looked extravagant.

Altina got on a spot that was elevated.

Regis stood diagonally behind her.

Eric stood beside him as the Escort Officer.

And the commanders of the Sixth and Eighth Army stood in neat formation before Altina with their staff officers.

The commander of the Sixth Army was Lieutenant General Bernard Jean de Dorval. He was about 40 years old.

With a bald head and a uniform with plenty of decorations, he still couldn't hide his bulging tummy. He had a gentle smile on his face.

"Thank you for making the long journey here, Madam Généralissime Argentina."

The commander of the Eighth Army was Lieutenant General Lorambert Abel de Rockhoward, 35 years old and had the standard buffed build of a Belgian soldier.

He saluted crisply.

"This humble one is the commander of the Eighth Army— Lieutenant General Rockhoward!"

As they had already discussed this before hand, Altina spoke without beating around the bush.

"I already know that the southern frontlines have been pulled back significantly. So does the new emperor Latreille who made the decision to send reinforcements."

"Ughh..."

Rockhoward gritted his teeth.

He seemed ashamed for being forced into such a situation by the enemy.

However, the one primarily responsible for this, Dorval remained unfazed.

Altina continued:

"As the Généralissime of the empire, I will assume command of all the units here. Anyone who opposes may speak out now."

"The Eighth Army is ready to carry out your orders!"

Rockhoward answered with his chest held high.

Dorval showed a smile that made others feel uncomfortable.

"I will be honored to follow the lead of the famed Généralissime."

"Hmm... Then I will ask in my capacity as your superior officer. Why did you retreat so far back without even fighting a proper battle?"

Rockhoward started sweating profusely. His face turned green and seemed to be on the verge of collapsing.

"Ah, well... We the Eighth Army is ready to do all we can to defend the empire's territory... I'm just following the orders of Lieutenant General Dorval."

Dorval was unexpectedly calm even though his name was brought up. Normally, someone would be a little anxious when they were being faulted.

— Is it because he is a grand noble from central?

His smile never left his face.

"My deep apologies. We fought a few skirmishes, but the enemy are religious fanatics who battle like beasts, so we prioritized the safety of the citizens. Our numbers are too small to defend the vast lands in the south..."

He droned on and on with his excuses.

There wasn't anything outside of Regis' expectation.

In summary, we did everything we can— That was why he was saying.

The enemy didn't have new weapons or unexpected new strategy.

They simply didn't fight a proper battle.

Altina cut off Dorval's explanation.

"Enough, I won't question what you did before any more. Since your are now under my command, there must not be any more instances of reluctance in engaging the enemy!"

"O-Of course!"

Rockhoward nodded.

On the other hand, Dorval showed a bitter face.

"Ahh~ my deepest apologies. Actually the Sixth Army is exhausted as we have been holding the frontlines for an extended period of time. If possible, I wish to request for more time to rest up..."

"Hmm? It doesn't seem that way? Or rather, they have gotten dull from resting too much."

Altina glared at him.

Dorval shook his head.

"No such thing! My house is also an impoverished noble in central. Hence, we have many old soldiers in my units, and they aren't as spry as the young men..."

"How can a commander behave like this!?"

Before she lashed out, Regis interjected:

"Your Highness... the exhaustion of the soldiers can't be discerned visually.

Let's take the advice of the experienced general."

"Muu... If Regis says so."

Dorval and Rockhoward both showed a surprised expression that says "So this guy is Regis".

They heard his name before, but this was the first time they saw him in person. They were probably shocked by his unsoldier-like appearance.

Dorval immediately made a toady smile.

"As expected of the famed hero strategist! Thank you very much for your kind understanding! Allow us to witness the heroic battles by the elites serving under Madam Généralissime."

Which meant, he just wants the Fourth Army to fight while he watches from the sidelines.

It was obvious that he had no intentions of fighting.

Regis tried to calm his emotions as much as possible, and said calmly:

"... I understand. When the Etruria Theocracy army attacks, the Fourth Army will engage the enemy with our full might. Since both of your armies are now under the Princess' command, please refrain from acting on your own."

""Understood!""

The two of them answered with a salute.

Regis nodded too, then turned around and saluted Altina.

Altina who was assigned a private chambers inside the Aroe Maroe city shouted:

"What the hell are they doing!? Don't they have any drive at all!?"

"... It's more serious than I imagined."

Regis sighed.

Altina was pacing around the room like a bear that had woken up during hibernation.

Clarice who always waits on her wasn't in the room as she needed to prepare lunch.

Eric stood at the door with his rifle as her escort officer. In his hands was the High Britanian made «Snider Rifle» gifted to him by Regis.

Eddie and Abidal Evra were tending to the troops. The soldiers were exhausted and unhappy after the long journey, so they had to keep an eye on them.

Right now, only Altina, Regis and Eric were in the room.

Eric said:

"But doesn't the Eighth Army's Lieutenant General Rockhoward seem full of

drive?"

"Yes, compared to Dorval."

When he heard their conversation, Regis tilted his head.

"... Is that so? The Eighth army didn't engage the Etruria Theocracy army directly either. He said he was just following the commander-in-chief's orders."

"Are you saying that is just an excuse?"

"... I'm not sure either. I have to ask someone who was here when the skirmishes happened."

"How about asking the staff officers from both armies?"

"No... No matter what, I don't think any of the staff officers will badmouth their commander."

Right now, Altina was the Généralissime, and had the authority to dismiss both commander's appointment. If a staff officer said something stupid, he

would be out of a job immediately.

Regis took out his pocket watch and checked it.

"There is still someone in this outfit who can tell the truth. I already called for him, he should ne..."

The door was knocked.

Eric answered the door.

The heavy doors were opened, and a man dressed like a noble bowed gracefully.

"This humble one is Inspector Frank Ignatius de Duran from the Ministry of Military Affairs. I'm honored to meet the renowned Madam Généralissime and Sir Strategist."

It was a handsome and graceful man.

Altina showed a face of detest.

"Inspector~?"

Regis mediated:

"Well, not all inspectors are selfish and greedy."

Inspector Becker who was assigned to the Beilschmidt Border Regiment was an infuriating man. That was the reason behind her prejudice against inspectors or their likes.

Frank shrugged.

"I understand. Just introducing myself as an inspector gives the impression that I'm fishing for a bribe. However, my wages are already enough for my family, and I'm not looking for more. My wife and son is like a goddess and angel, and I want for nothing else except their smiles."

What's with the sudden assault of random thoughts?

This person might be a weirdo.

Regis scratched his face.

"Erm... Inspector Duran is introduced to me by Ms Fanrine. She said that we can ask him anything after we meet up with the Eighth Army."

Fanrine was a General Administration Officer in the Ministry of Military Affairs. She couldn't be wrong.

It wasn't nice to talk at the door after asking him to come— so Regis ushered him in.

The few of them sat around a table for four.

Altina sat on the inside, Regis took the seat to her left. As the escort officer, Eric stood diagonally behind her to the right.

Frank who sat opposite her continued.

"I'm not a soldier, so I don't know how I may be of assistance... I traveled together with the Eighth Army when they were despatched to the south."

Regis nodded.

"Do tell us what you know. How Lieutenant General Dorval and Lieutenant General Rockhoward exercise their command. I hope to learn everything in detail."

Altina said apologetically.

"It was wrong of me to assume all inspectors are bad. I'm very sorry."

No no, Frank shook his head.

"I do hope you all can trust me, but I myself don't trust my inspector colleagues. They are just rats living on the ship named the Ministry of Military Affairs. The retards who finally gnawed a hole through the bottom of the ship. Well, the Ministry is finally paying the price and dissolved for the bill it chalked up over the years... Ah, officially, I don't have any post right now. When I introduced myself arrogantly earlier, that was just a lie."

He looked bright and cheery, and didn't seem to care where his next posting would be. As if he already secured a winning ticket. Maybe he already had a backup plan ready.

Regis added in a bit of idle chat:

"... Normally, the organization would be dissolved after the personnel have been reassigned... But to actually dismiss all the employees, that goes to show how much anger Emperor Latreille bore towards the Ministry of Military Affairs. Just how much headache did they cost him when he was Field Marshal?"

Hahaha... Frank merely laughed, and avoided commenting on the new Emperor.

Back to the topic;

"So, can you tell us about the command and actions of the Eighth Army?"

"Just what happened that led to this current situation?"

"Lieutenant General Rockhoward... is very cautious, but he would issue unexpected orders at times."

"... Eh?"

"He is from a grand noble house in the west, and should be well versed with strategy and tactics... But there are times when he misses the forest for the trees."

"F-For example...?"

"There are several, the most critical one is when they just linked up with the Sixth Army for the defence of Sembione city—"

One month ago.

Sembione city was a big city founded on a hill.

It didn't have tall walls, but it had wells, water reservoirs and plenty of food, making it an adequate military base.

There were 20,000 soldiers from the Sixth Army garrisoned here.

It wasn't clear why Dorval retreated here.

The Sixth Army's base should be a sturdier fort at the frontlines further to the south.

But it was lost in a short time, and they had to retreat across the Calena river to Sembione city. This situation was entirely their responsibility.

No matter what, Sembione city still had 50,000 citizens and 20,000 soldiers.

The Eighth Army linked up with them here.

Rockhoward said:

"Our unit is here to assist on Field Marshal Latreille's orders. If the Sixth and Eighth Army work together, we can surely repel the Etruria Theocracy army in one fell swoop!"

Dorval looked at the unit and asked:

"How much food do you have?"

"Enough for the Eighth Army to fight for a month."

"Hmm..."

Judging from common sense, this amount wasn't an issue. But Dorval ordered an evacuation of the city as if he sensed something.

Maybe he just want to reduce the rate of food consumption in the city while they turtled in the city, so he reduced the number of citizens here.

A week later, the Etruria Theocracy army appeared before Sembione city with 20,000 troops.

The Empire was 40,000 strong.

Rockhoward decided to end the war swiftly, and proposed leaving the city to engage the enemy. Dorval accepted this proposal.

When Regis heard that, he couldn't help shouting:

"What?!"

"As I thought, you think that is strange too?"

"That's because... They had a fort right there for their defences. They should let the Etruria Theocracy attack and grind down a part of their numbers. After the enemy is exhausted, they could open the gate and force a decisive battle with the enemies on the plains."

Regis wasn't talking about any amazing strategy.

This was common sense.

It was a strategy that could be found in any normal textbook, the basics of the basics.

Frank nodded.

"So, as for why Lieutenant General Rockhoward suddenly proposed fighting outside the city... I heard what his conversation with his staff officers."

In a room assigned to the Eighth Army.

The Lieutenant General sat in a leather chair in the innermost side, surrounded by his staff officers standing around his table.

It was the Eighth Army's war conference.

A Staff Officer reported:

"The Etruria Theocracy army is here! There are 20,000 of them!"

"Hmmp... The Sixth Army kept saying retreat retreat, which made me wondered how large the enemy forces are. So it's only this much huh?"

"There's nothing to fear, the Belgaria Empire's victory is inevitable!"

"Hahaha! We can't let our guard down alright?"

It was a word of caution, but it was said with a joking tone which made the staff officers burst out in laughter.

The battle had not even started, and Rockhoward was already cheering as if victory was a given.

The staff officers also basked in the joyous atmosphere.

"The Sixth Army's Lieutenant General Dorval will thank us too. This victory is thanks to the arrival of the Eighth Army. The nobles and Ministry of Military Affairs will evaluate us highly too."

"Hee hee... I'm not interested in thanks and praises... But it can't be helped if I become a shining star!"

Rockhoward was a noble from the west.

He was part of the First Prince faction.

As Auguste forfeit his succession rights to the throne during Founding Day in April, Rockhoward became the laughing stock in the social world.

His status was even lower than the new nobles from the south.

He yearns for a chance to salvage his reputation.

None of his staff officers wanted to be a wet blanket, so they were all gung ho and high spirited.

"Even in a straight up fight in the plains, the Empire with twice their numbers will never lose."

"That's right! Let's teach those conscripts who switched their hoes for spears what a real battle is!"

"This is a good chance to show them the might of our traditional western swordsmanship!"

Without even drinking a sip of wine, these bunch of staff officers started getting hyped as if they were drunk.

Rockhoward shouted in high spirit:

"Alright! Attack! We can win by fighting in the plains, why are we still defending the fort!?"

"... My head hurts."

It had been a long time since Regis felt a headache.

He sighed.

Frank frowned:

"Regrettably, I'm not exaggerating. They decided on their battle plan with the same atmosphere when deciding to go fox hunting."

"Yes... I can't tell he is such a person."

"It might not be appropriate for a noble like me to say this, but aristocrats are like lions who boast at home, and act like loyal dogs in the presence of their supervisors."

"... That's true. But why didn't Lieutenant General Dorval reject this retarded proposal?"

"I don't have any evidence... but it seems that their rations were running low."

"... I thought they had sufficient supplies?"

"The fact was, when the Sixth Army retreated in defeat, they abandoned almost all of their rations. And they also brought many refugees with them. But the fact that they were still protecting our citizens when evacuating was praiseworthy."

If they are going to protect the citizens, they should ensure a steady food supply too, and cover all the corners

— That was the meaning hidden in his words.

Even Altina was hugging her head.

"What are they doing, those hairless retards?!"

"... Your Highness, let's not talk about body hair... At least the citizens and soldiers are safe. It's a good thing that he made such a decision... Well, we brought plenty of rations with us, which should be enough to satisfy them."

They already received the report that a large amount of rations was needed, so the Fourth Army brought several more time food than usual.

Frank shrugged.

"Although the forts and Sembione city should have adequate food stores..."

"... They are now rations for the Etruria Theocracy army."

"Probably so."

Not just the three seated people, even Eric standing behind sighed.

Altina started complaining.

"Is Etruria still not attacking because they ate too much and couldn't walk?"

"Haha... Well, maybe they are waiting for the rainy season to end. It is almost September, so it should be over soon."

"Is that so?"

The dialogue was almost over, but Altina shouted: "Wait wait wait!"

She showed four fingers on her right hand, and two fingers on her left hand:

"Even if leaving the base to attack is a mistake, the Belgaria Empire has 40,000 men, while the Etruria Theocracy has 20,000. Why did they lose?!"

Frank answered:

"When the two forces were facing off, a fire broke out in Sembione city."

"Fire?!"

"It seemed to have been caused by carelessness. But we only learned about it from the city guards after the fact... Lieutenant General Dorval who had overall command outside the city judged this to be “the base behind us had fallen”, and ordered a full retreat..."

"~~~?!"

Altina was shocked beyond words.

Regis said with a sigh:

"Hmm... This is just like the scene from Klone Milo's famed work 《Heroes Elegy》. It is widely praised for being an outstanding heroic novel, but in the decisive battle, it was criticized for the part where “the enemy fell into a panic because of a fire that broke out suddenly, giving the protagonist a chance to turn the table”."

Altina said angrily:

"If there are 40,000 troops, the results of our battle with High Britannia would have been different! But a misunderstanding over a fire is mistaken for an enemy attack despite having such a large army!? Stop kidding me!"

"... I can understand being mistaken when their base that had only minimal forces caught on fire."

"Really?!"

"... But they should have sent a messenger to verify first. They can order the retreat after making sure that the base had been lost."

And of course, this would only work if they had deployed their troops cautiously to avoid pincer attacks.

Altina vented her anger for that decision which was really too retarded.

Did nervousness result in the commander's mistake on the ground?

That might be so, but for a mishandling of fire to lead to such tremendous loss wasn't a joke one could laugh about.

How much blood would need to be spilled to seize back the fort?

It rained a little this evening, but the weather was clear the next day and the day after.

Chapter 2: A Normal Day in a War Zone

There was a heavy steel gate on the stone building.

As this was a military facility, they wouldn't use wooden doors found in normal houses.

Since the steel door was too heavy, the hinge creaked loudly.

Regis used his shoulder to ease the slowly closing door.

"Phew..."

It was almost evening, but it was still very hot.

He wiped away the sweat from his brows with his sleeve.

He was just about to head for the back door when he heard a voice behind him.

"Where are you going?"

"Huh?!"

"Regis...?"

The one staring at Regis from the side was Altina.

He was found out.

"... I'm going out for a bit to gather information on this city."

"Just leave that to the troops."

"No no no, there are things I can't delegate to others."

"Even though this is the territory of the Belgarian empire, it was enemy land just a century ago, so don't let down your guard. So, you are forbidden from going out alone— Isn't that what you told me, Regis?"

"... That's because Altina is the Généralissime."

"You are also a key personnel now!"

"... No no, someone like me is no different from a speck of dust, right?"

"Didn't you say that you have heavy responsibilities!?"

Altina grabbed the sleeve of Regis' uniform and shook.

"Well— this matter can't be helped."

"Huh? What's your reason?"

"... We went straight to the city centre after going through the gate in the day, correct?"

"Yes."

Regis said reluctantly:

"On the way here, I saw a bookshop and..."

"Ehh—?"

There was a fierce rage in Altina's smile.

"Wait wait wait, please calm down and listen."

"I'm already listening to you calmly. But I don't know if I can be calm after hearing you out."

"... This is a bookshop 200Li (888km) from the capital you know? Just imagining what books they have in stock fills me with excitement. Less than 50 years have passed since the advent of movable type book printing, so there are handwritten books from the past too. Maybe books from the Etruria Theocracy or Hispania Empire are sold here too. Even if the books cost as much as a house, I will be satisfied with just looking at them. But that is a bookshop in a corner of the city, so it probably won't have books that are as extravagant as art pieces. If there are books from the Empire, they must have gone through stringent selection to ensure it will sell well. What is the bestselling book here? And who is the author? Aren't you curious about that!?"

"Not really."

Regis slouched his shoulders.

"...Y-Yeah."

Hah~, Altina sighed and ruffled her hair. She messed up her vermillion hair that was carefully combed for the meeting with the Lieutenant Generals.

"Yes, I understand! But I'm going with you okay?!"

"Ehh?! Well..."

"This is my first time visiting a city in the south too. I saw some of the buildings while passing through, but I still want to look at them properly."

"No... But it is dangerous for Madam Généralissime to go alone..."

"Erm! Don't you want to visit the bookshop!"

Altina hugged Regis' arm.

Regis felt something soft at his elbow.

— She had grown there too.

"Uwahh?!"

"It will be fine! We just need to be back before dawn!"

Regis was dragged out of the back door into the city.

And of course, there were sentries posted here. But after seeing Altina's crimson hair and eyes that were proof of her royal heritage, no one dared to stop her.

"Ooohhhh~?!"

Regis squealed excitedly in the shop.

Altina stood behind him with a bored expression.

"What is it? Did you see something weird?"

"Amazing!"

"I think this place is no different from a normal bookshop."

Even though the building design was different from the capital and its surrounding cities, the floor, ceiling and shelves were all made from wood, and there wasn't anything special about them

The shop attendant wore short sleeves, which was rare in bookshops known

for their expensive wares.

Or rather, the shop owner was the one looking intriguingly at Regis who didn't look like a soldier, and the girl with vermillion hair and eyes that was rare in this country.

But Regis only had eyes for these books.

"This! It was published 20 years ago! A rare book many collectors are searching painstakingly for."

"Hmm... It's an old book?"

"Yes it is, an old book!"

The price of books twenty years ago was much higher than the present. There were many who wanted it but had to give up in tears.

And after these young people obtained the economical means with the passage of time, they would start to search and purchase the books they didn't buy in the past. It was a moving moment that would bring tears to the collector.

Regis scanned the books on the shelves.

These books weren't packed tightly with its spine facing out. Every book was displayed properly as they were all high quality and expensive products, so the cover could be shown perfectly to the customers.

It was the rules in bookshops that customers may not touch the books without permission from the owner.

"... After adding in the transport fee, it is now costlier than its time at publishing, this is a book that can't be bought at the capital... At this price, this is a steal."

"Wait wait wait, Regis?! This cost a month of your salary. Don't talk nonsense."

"Ah, well... I'm a First Grade Admin Officer now, so my weekly wages had gone up..."

Speaking of which, the Ministry of Military Affairs that oversaw disbursing the wages had been dissolved. Their authority had been transferred to the First

Army and the Office of the Généralissime.

Regis suppressed his voice and said:

"...Altina, the wages will still be paid out right?"

"Even if you ask me... Aren't you the one handling it?"



"Ugh."

Including that part, the administrative matters related to the Office of the Généralissime were now under the purview of Count Gauchen, so there shouldn't be any problem.

The First Army had taken over the Ministry of Military Affairs' building.

Right now, the First Army was even in charge of the Military budget and was the premier army in the nation.

Although most of the command authority and budget had been handed over, the relationship between Latreille and Altina didn't improve because of that. Those who were related to the Fourth Army still had no place in the palace.

Count Gauchen bought the mansion of a noble who had fallen from grace and used it as the《Administrative Building for the Office of the Généralissime》.

The intention of the new emperor Latreille, where were the funds, what orders he issued to whom, were the soldiers eating well— the employees of the Ministry of Military Affairs knew that the best.

Everything related to the Fourth Army had been delegated to the Administrative Officers hired by Count Gauchen.

However, the old Ministry of Military Affairs had more than 2,000 staff, but only 150 were employed by the Office of the Généralissime.

There was a chaotic period during the reorganization.

So, there might be cases when the wages were paid out late.

It might be fine in the capital, but Regis couldn't defer payment in a shop near the borders.

Even Regis couldn't steel himself to spend all his money before a campaign.

"Hmm... After all, if I find a book I want to buy more, it will be a headache if I don't have the money then."

"That's the reason?!"

"... Ah, I will save half the money of course."

"You will need living expenses after all."

"No, I still have books I'm planning to buy in the capital's bookshop and put it on my tab, that's why..."

"Can you survive like this?!"

"Haha... Don't worry, I will be fine. Food, clothing and lodging are all free in the army after all."

"Ehh—"

Altina frowned a little.

That wasn't wrong.

Even though most of the books in this shop were published over a decade ago, that was exactly why Regis was mesmerized by them.

"... Aroe Maroe sure is a nice city."

"How can you base your judgement on its books?"

"Fufufu... Hehe..."

Regis browsed the shelves as he made a strange laughing sound he wasn't aware of himself

Sometime later, still in the bookshop—

Altina raised a topic related to the military, partly because there weren't any other customers.

"Erm, can we defeat Etruria?"

"Huh? You are worried about that?"

"Maybe Regis think there is no problem... But I still don't know how this battle will play out."

"... The Etruria Theocracy army can mobilize 30,000 men at most."

Even though they were stronger than the Varden Archduchy or the Langobalt Kingdom of the Germanian Federation, they were just half as strong as High Brittania. Maybe on par with the Estaburg Kingdom to the ease.

Regis said confidently:

"On the other hand, the Belgarian Empire committed almost 50,000 troops into the south. This number is more than enough to take back the lost territories and launch a counter-invasion."

"So we will definitely win."

"... Of course. But the problem isn't about winning or losing."

"Is that so?"

Altina tilted her head.

Regis surveyed the shop once again to check for other patrons. The shop owner was looking this way, but he wouldn't hear them if they kept it down.

"... The main issue is, how many soldiers will be left in the south after this campaign."

Soldiers weren't limitless, and good officers were even more valuable. A unit would be rendered ineffective if it loses too many of its officers.

"It's true that no one wants to lose their soldiers."

"... I think Emperor Latreille's plan is to crush the invading Etruria Theocracy army, take back our bases and invade them."

"What?!"

"... He said that he wants to conquer the neighbouring countries in two years. IF he was serious, then he would need to at least take down Etruria Theocracy by the end of the year."

"But we are going to invade another nation!"

"... Like I mentioned earlier, this city belonged to another nation a century ago."

And that country's name had been wiped off the map.

Altina pondered and said:

"Is he going to issue that order to us?"

"... That is the reason why he bestowed the baton of the Généralissime to

you. And why I want to avoid tiring out the Fourth Army too much in this battle."

"I want to rid this world of war. As well as poverty and gaps in social status... My dream is to make a peaceful world. But now, I must invade another country?"

"... You don't need to lead the campaign yourself, just delegate the task to someone you can trust."

"It's the same even if I give the order. What do you think we should do, Regis?"

"... Even if we protest, the Emperor right now is His Majesty Latreille. It is the duty of soldiers to follow orders. If we want to carry out our own will, we will have to raise the flag of rebellion... But the only thing we can protect by doing so is our will."

"Is that so?!"

Altina swallowed the rest of her words.

What Regis said wasn't what he truly feels.

Altina wasn't driven by her emotions, which showed how much she had matured.

"You think this will be fine?"

"... Even if it sullies my name in the history books, I will still adopt the best strategy for the sake of my goal. At least for now, we need to follow the directions of the new Emperor."

Altina lowered her head.

"I understand. Since the day Latreille became Emperor, I knew this day would come."

"... Please don't be too rash. Don't let your feelings show."

"I'm not a kid anymore, it will be fine."

Regis remembered the headaches he had back in the days when she would lose control.

It wasn't that long ago.

Regis exhaled, then brought the topic back to the "present".

"... The South is under the purview of the Sixth Army in the first place. There's something that bothers me a little, so we should make them work hard."

"There's something bothering you?"

"... Just a speculation."

At this moment, the door of the bookshop was opened.

An elderly gentleman who seemed rather well known locally entered along with a young lady.

The shop owner bowed politely.

He retrieved a book that wasn't on display from under his counter and present it to the gentleman.

Their conversation wasn't audible, but a book that was pre ordered had probably arrived.

It was hard to talk in the inner city filled with soldiers from the Sixth Army, and the content wasn't something that the citizens should know, so Regis left the shop.

When they returned to the fort, the courtyard was noisy.

The soldiers seemed to have gathered.

They were about to check what happened when Eric came their way at charging attack speed.

"Your Highness! Sir Regis! Where did you go?!"

Altina replied with an awkward smile.

"Ahaha... we visited the city for a little..."

"And you didn't bring any escorts!? Am I that unreliable?!"

"N-No. I just think that bringing guards with me will draw too much attention, and we won't be able to visit the place we want to go."

"Your Highness is an important person, we will be troubled if you wandered

off to any place you like!"

Altina who was in a pinch looked at Regis with pleading eyes. After all, Regis was the one who wanted to tour the streets alone.

However, Regis' eyes were focused on the courtyard behind Eric.

Was that person surrounded by Belgaria troops a mercenary?

Speaking of powerful mercenaries—

"Ah, the Mercenary King?!"

The person in the courtyard was someone familiar. He was the leader of the Mercenary band《Renard Pendu》, Gilbert Schweinzeberg.

He brought his elite mercenaries along with him.

Gilbert also noticed them and walked over.

"Long time no see, Strategist."

"... You are finally here."

"My sisters and subordinates got taken hostage after all."

"Ehh, I don't mean that at all? Didn't I clearly state in the letter that they are just traveling with us?"

"It is the norm for mercenaries that turning down that request means forfeiting the lives of your comrades."

"... I'm not a mercenary."

Altina smiled:

"You look lively, Gilbert!"

"Your Highness seemed to have gotten thinner."

His expression was unexpectedly friendly.

Regis commented without thinking:

"... You two seemed to have gotten along splendidly after I left."

"Ehh? Not really?"

"Nope."

"We just formed a sense of camaraderie after sparring with swords."

"I don't deny that."

So, they communicated through martial arts huh.

Regis grabbed his head.

"... Why did you spar with a prisoner? Why did you do that?"

Back then, everyone objected, but no one in the Fourth Army could restrain Altina's drive to improve her swordsmanship.

Eric seemed to remember the commotion back then and sighed.

As they spoke, another group came to the courtyard.

A little girl sprinted with all her might.

"Onii-chan~~~~~!!!"

She was so loud that the entire fort probably heard her.

Gilbert muttered.

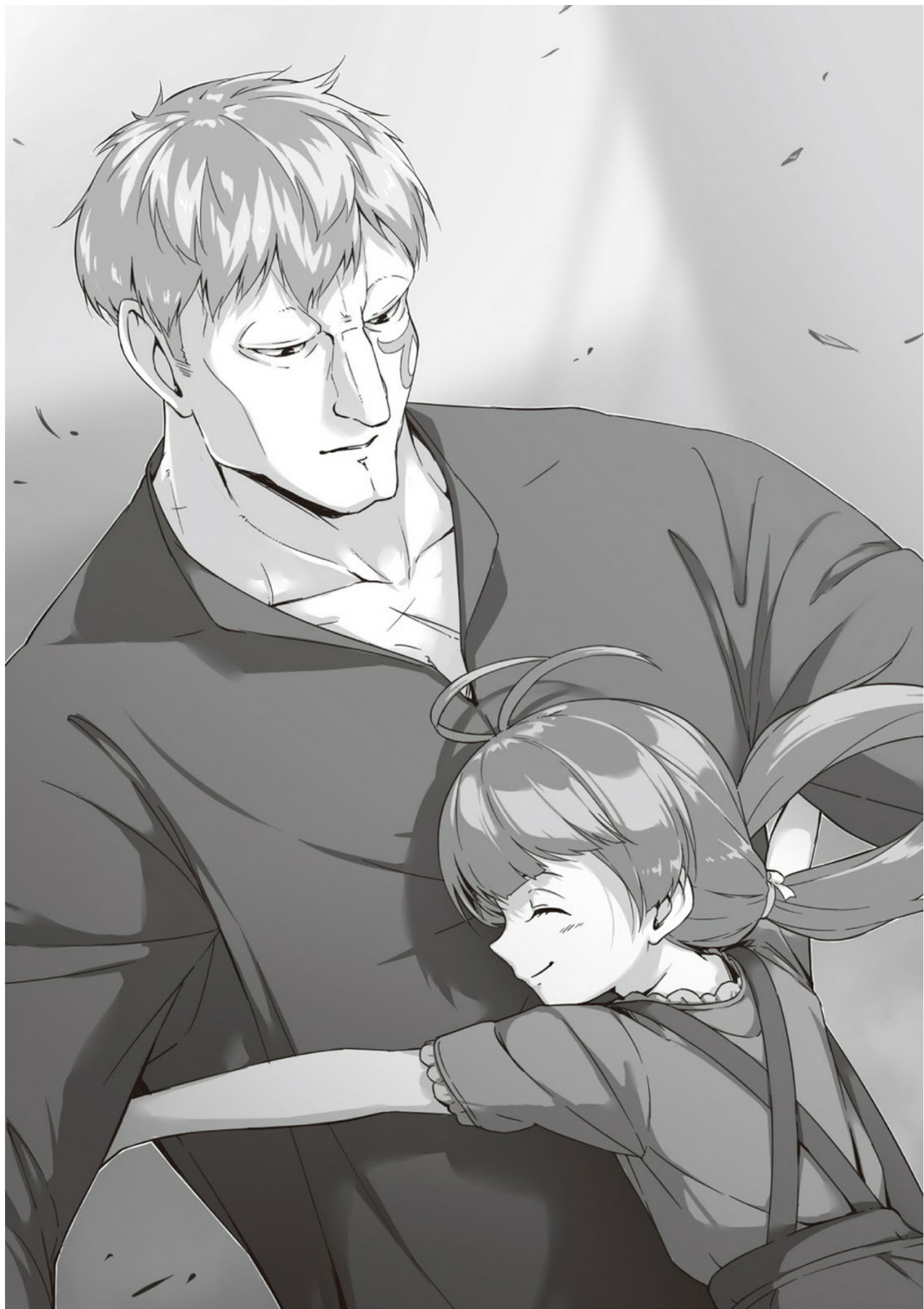
"...Martina."

It was a gentle voice that didn't sound like him.

Pomf! Martina charged into Gilbert's embrace.

"Onii-chan~!! Onii-chan~~!!!"

The ones who came with her, were the《Renard Pendu》mercenary group that followed the Fourth Army.



Cries of “Band Leader! Band Leader” could be heard from them.

Some even cried.

"Yeah."

Gilbert nodded.

The mercenaries imprisoned in Fort Volks were happy to reunite with their band.

What a moving scene.

However, the ones who broke up this band that had such strong bonds were the Fourth Army, Regis felt conflicted.

He glanced at Jessica who was standing in the shade of a building.

And walked that way.

Regis said to her:

"... Aren't you going to talk to Mr Gilbert?"

"Later. Now isn't the time to discuss future plans calmly."

She answered coldly.

"...Don't you miss him?"

"Yes, and I'm finally free of the burden on my shoulders. There are many things I need to think about as the acting band leader. After all, the more people there are, the more trouble there is, I don't even have time to read books."

"That is true."

"Thank you very much, Lord Auric. You really released my brother and allowed us to meet again."

"I fulfilled my end of the deal, so you can rest easy."

"About half of my mind is relaxed."

"I know. Regarding the issue on support... What do you think, how about

continuing to work under the Fourth Army? Unlike before, it is now the Office of the Généralissime. We are still in the midst of reorganizing the army, but we can afford to pay an adequate price for the service of《Renard Pendu》."

"You already mustered 50,000 men to fight the likes of the Etruria Theocracy, do you even need help? What are you scheming?"

"It's not for the upcoming battle, for what comes after that."

"... I see."

"For mercenaries from the freezing Germanian Federation, this might be a bit harsh."

Jessica looked up into the sky. This was her habit when she was thinking.

"... I will consider it, but onii-sama will make the final decision."

"That will be great."

"But your face seems to say that you already know the answer."

"... No, it might make sense logically, but I don't know what will happen if emotions are mixed in."

"If we get hired by Etruria and Hispania, what are you going to do?"

"Hmm... That will be troubling for me. But I don't recommend you do that."

"Why?"

"Those two countries didn't notice that the lion they are tossing rocks at had awoken. There is no future for such a slow-witted country."

Jessica smoothened the edge of her clothes that got wrinkled by the wind.

"... Is the new Emperor Latreille that powerful?"

"Yes."

"... Looks like the war with the High Brittania Kingdom was just child's play."

During that war, Latreille was ambushed by《Renard Pendu》, and the injury was so bad that it affected his eyesight.

During the battle of fort Bonaire, he also lost the initiative.

Regis shook his head.

"... Not only is His Majesty Latreille an excellent commander, he is also an exceptional ruler. Although he had the tendency to take to the frontlines personally, he will be staying in the palace for some time because of his war injury. However, I think that will make the Empire even stronger."

"Everything you say lacks concrete evidence."

"... In half a year, the Empire will be able to manufacture enough rifles to arm all the infantry in the Fourth Army. Ammunition might be paper, but there would be a steady supply of them. And of course, the Etruria Theocracy doesn't possess such industrial power, even the Hispania Empire can't match this."

"....."

Jessica looked as stoic as ever but didn't reply anymore.

Eric ran over again. He didn't behave like an escort officer and acted more like a maid.

"Sir Regis! Your brother-in-law is here!"

"Ehh?"

The sky was dyed dark red.

A two-wheel carriage arrived at the courtyard. The outer zones were guarded by the Sixth Army with serious faces.

While the brusque mercenaries of《Renard Pendu》watched the inside.

The man at the heart of their group was Gilbert. Martina clung tightly to his back.

Opposite the Mercenary King were Altina and Regis. Eric stood behind them.

And now, Regis' brother-in-law Enzo was also here.

"Yo! Regis-chan! You are really alive!"

He laughed heartily.

"... Yes. Should I count myself lucky or... I never imagined that brother-in-law will come to the south."

"I have many reasons to do so."

"Are you here to help maintain the soldier's gear?"

"I will if I have time. But that isn't it— I was planning to go home during Prince Latreille's coronation."

"Many people will visit for the coronation, so it's a good chance to do business."

"But back then, I received news of Regis-chan's demise on the battlefield."

"... So, it's because of me?"

Enzo scratched his head.

"Her Highness marched the army off in a frenzy. She didn't prepare the rations and forced marched the infantry. In such a situation, I have to follow, right?"

"That was too harsh."

"And the worst scenario would be a civil war between the First and Fourth Armies."

"Ehh..."

"I can't abandon my wife and kids in such a situation, so I want to go home even if I had to do it on my own. But my disciple and the soldiers stopped me from acting rashly."

"Yes. If civil war really breaks out, then the blacksmith in Fort Volks would be branded traitors. Even if you return to Rouen City, you will be arrested before you can see your family."

"I had no choice but to ask my folks to watch over them. I then wrote a letter to my wife and disciples."

"Yes."

"And then, I heard the news that Regis-chan is still alive before I receive their reply."

"Yes... Military-related mail sure travels fast."

"It was a surprise, but it was great news."

Enzo sighed with relief.

Regis bowed his head.

"... I'm very sorry for making you worry."

"No, it's fine... After feeling relieved, the heard news that you will be heading south the next day. I don't get it at all."

"... That was unexpected for me too. I even wondered if the new Emperor Latreille was picking trouble with us."

Enzo carefully took out a letter from his pocket.

"As I was wondering what was going on— I received a reply from my wife."

"What did she say?"

He opened the letter and showed it to Regis.

There were many lines on the letter.

But it revolves around just one thing.

— Do what you think you should do.

Enzo carefully kept the letter.

"I felt the importance of family."

"Huh? That's great... but why did you come to the south?"

His workshop is in Rouen City, which was right beside the capital. His family and disciples also live there.

"Things didn't blow up this time, so when is the real thing?"

"... Erm, that won't happen."

Soldiers from the Sixth Army were watching from afar. They probably couldn't hear their conversation, but he shouldn't admit his intention to rebel in the presence of so many people.

Enzo was a bit slow, but he noticed.

He got back on topic.

"I think I can be of assistance."

Regis nodded.

"... You will definitely be a big help."

"That's great. It took half a month for me to get here, I don't think I can laugh it off if you told me I was useless."

"... We are the one who needs you. You are our family after all."

"That's it! That's the reason why I came to the south."

It seemed that Regis' words were linked to the 'importance of family' mentioned earlier.

Enzo continued:

"My wife is Regis-chan's sister, and I'm responsible for the repair of Her Highness' sword, right? And I worked in Fort Volks before. It feels wrong for me to just go back to Rouen city and run my business leisurely— something like that."

As expected of Regis' honest and loyal brother-in-law.

"... And this is?"

"He is my disciple Leonardo. He is hard to understand at times, but he has a quicker wit than me. Probably."

"... He is very smart."

"So you think so too huh. I plan to move my family and disciples to the south for their safety. But only after Regis-chan repels the invading enemy."

"... The commander is Her Highness. I will also do my best, of course."

Enzo lowered his head at Altina.

"Allow me to provide my humble service, I will be in your care."

"Your presence puts me at ease! I'm counting on you!"

Altina answered with a bright smile.

Regis asked Enzo in a hushed voice:

"... It's settled then, brother-in-law... Did you come together with《Renard Pendu》? Aren't you worried?"

They were mercenaries put into forced labour after being captured by the Fourth Army.

After they were free, the brother-in-law of the strategist traveling with them — wouldn't Enzo feel it was dangerous?

Enzo said with a laugh:

"Gilbert is a good guy. We are friends now!"

"Friends?!"

Regis looked at the Mercenary King who didn't refute that claim and was wearing a faint smile.

— What in the world happened?!

Regis opened his eyes wide.

The next day—

Bang! A gunshot rang out.

A hole appeared on the armour hanging on the wall. If someone was wearing it, that would pierce his heart and kill him.

Eric reloaded swiftly.

And took aim again.

Bang!

This time, a hole was blown through the helmet of the armour.

Woooahh... The crowd watching started chattering.

Four out of five shots were on target.

He was unquestionably an outstanding rifleman.

The new rifle was sent to the unit less than two months ago, so it was clear how much effort Eric put into training.

This was the courtyard inside the fort of Aroe Maroe city, morning.

The officers of the Sixth and Eighth Army were watching Eric demonstrate shooting with the new rifle. The officers from the Fourth Army who didn't participate in the battle against High Britannia were also present.

Regis picked up the new rifle.

"... This is the rifle used by the High Britannia Army when they invaded the Belgaria Empire recently."

Dorval expressed his thoughts on behalf of the soldiers watching.

"The reloading speed is actually that fast!"

"... Yes. After some training, the reloading speed will be five times that of the muskets that are currently being used. This means just by equipping the new rifle, it will be equivalent to increasing the musketeers by five times."

"Hmmm."

"... And it has high accuracy. Fifth Grade Combat Officer Eric Michael de Blanchard here has excellent skills, but his shot wouldn't be this precise if the bullets don't fly straight."

Dorval asked:

"Isn't he a knight? Did he practiced using the rifle from a young age?"

"... Anyone can achieve above 50% accuracy with three months of training."

"Hmmm."

That was a lie.

During the journey here, Regis practiced one hundred shots but didn't improve at all.

Hopeless. Waste of bullet. Retard— After hearing what the people around him said, Regis gave up.

So the part about 'anyone' was a lie.

But there was no need to go out of their way to mention such troubling facts.

"... These are High Britannia made rifle we captured. But soon, the new Belgaria-made rifle will be ready for loan. Riflemen units will become an

important asset in the future, so it will be better to decide on the choice of personnel now."

Dorval sighed troublingly.

The other officers also showed bitter faces.

They were outstanding knights and highly proficient in swordsmanship and the spear fighting. They weren't thrilled to learn that the martial arts they put so much effort in will be superseded by rifles now.

But the world was ever changing.

They were still deliberating whether the Sixth and Eighth Army would join the Office of the Généralissime... But there was a good chance they would happen.

The archaic rostering system was a headache.

An officer raised his hand.

"Sir Strategist, can I try a shot!?"

He was a burly built man that was one head taller than the rest, a knight from the Eighth Army.

Regis nodded in agreement.

"Please."

Since the weapon was captured from the enemy, the rifles and munitions both had limited quantity, but they had enough for them to be not stingy in such a situation. The rest would be up to Eric.

"Can you teach him?"

"Yes Sir!"

The young knight walked over eagerly.

Since he had a spear, his martial skills shouldn't be too bad. And even so, he was very interested in the new rifle, which was commendable.

In the hands of this burly man, the rifle looked one size smaller.

Eric enthusiastically tutored him from the side.

He seemed prepared to teach others. It wasn't long before that knight held

the rifle in a proper aiming position.

He aimed with one eye closed.

"Hmm... There isn't much difference from the old model."

"The shooting part is the only thing that is similar. The aiming reticle and reloading method are very different."

"Understood."

With the pull of the trigger, there was a bang.

The targeted armour was hit with another hole. The knight waved his fist excitedly.

"I hit it!"

This lit the competitive spirit in the other knights who waved their hands eagerly.

"You are too close! Stand down! I can hit the target even after taking ten steps back!"

"Let me try!"

The western nobles showed their rarely seen side.

"Me, me!": the officers of the Eighth army shouted repeatedly.

The Sixth Army officers just shrugged and backed away. They seemed unconcerned about this.

When they were about to leave, Dorval said:

"Since this will be sent here from the capital, I will gather some volunteers first. This equipment might be a loan, but there won't be any rental fee, right?"

Because Altina wasn't here, his attitude was a bit cockier than their first meeting.

Regis nodded.

"... I don't think there is."

"Then it's settled then. After all, we don't have that the excess funds to spend on rifles."

It's related to money again huh— Regis thought.

Dorval was a grand noble from central, but not all grand nobles were wealthy.

Maybe he was really troubled by finance issues?

After the rifle exhibition was finished, Regis and Eric headed for the Officers' Mess.

"Thanks to you, the exhibition went smoothly."

"I'm glad to be of help."

Eric replied with a smile.

Ever since they decided to hold a rifle exhibition, Eric had been very tense. He was finally smiling, which put Regis at ease.

"It's glad that you can use a rifle... If I am the one demonstrating, they might misunderstand and think this rifle is worse than a toy gun."

Eric smiled awkwardly.

"Ahaha... Sir Regis can do it too if you practice more."

"I better not. I don't have the talent for using rifles at all. The marks on my shoulder had finally faded."

"Without being familiar with it, even firing one shot will leave a mark."

"What about now?"

"There isn't any problem now. My body had learned how to disperse the recoil when firing."

"Hmm..."

Eric bowed deeply.

"I am very grateful to you, Sir Regis. When I couldn't exert any strength with my left hand, I even thought about leaving the army."

"....."

"But now, I'm an escort officer and a rifleman, I'm very thankful for that."

"Yes... Well, you are stronger than me even though you got hurt."

"Because Sir Regis is a very special person. You can defeat an army of 10,000 just by wielding your pen."

In the face of such lavish compliments, Regis' face turned red.

Speaking of which, Eric always spoke with elegance.

"... I will work hard to meet your expectations."

"Me too. Please continue to guide me on, Sir Regis."

"Y-Yes."

They arrived at the mess.

Regis stared with his eyes wide open.

"This is...?!"

The astonishing fact made him stood in place dumbfoundedly.

His hands started trembling.

"Hmm? Ah, isn't that Regis. Thank you for your hard work too, Eric."

Altina who was already there waved at them.

Regis said with trembling lips:

"... Who are you?"

"Hey... What are you saying?!"

"It's unbelievable. Altina is reading a book?!"

"How rude! I also read at times!"

Fufu, Eric laughed wryly.

"Her Highness had been reading a lot recently. She said she want Regis to see how much she had grown when he comes back."

Altina blushed.

"N-Not really... I have always been reading books."

"That's wonderful."

When she heard what Regis said, Altina's heart skipped a beat.

"I-Is that so?"

"Yes, reading is a wonderful thing. Every book has its own value."

"Ahaha..."

"I feel a sudden urge to eat, so I will be going back to my room."

"Hey! Didn't you come here to eat!?"

Not just Altina, even Eric was stopping him.

Regis gritted his teeth.

"It's suffering to look at other people reading before me."

"The food is coming soon."

"Even if I fill my stomach, I can't live if I don't read books."

"I don't think that's true, but let's drop it."

It might sound like a joke, but it showed his true thoughts. Regis could go without food if he could read.

As they were chatting, the maids brought a large plate over. Clarice was there too.

At this moment, the officers from the Fourth Army also entered the mess.

Today's menu was ham, duck, venison, potato and tomato.

The officers started to dine.

Regis put a piece of duck meat into his mouth.

The sweet tangerine sauce was delicious.

"... We brought plenty of rations with us, so we don't need to worry about food for now. But if we don't recover the lost territory quickly, the citizens will suffer."

"That's our plan in the first place, did something change?"

"... Nobody knows when we can recover the fields to the south of Aroe Maroe City, correct? Hence, the price of wheat and vegetables increased a lot. It is so bad that it will affect the Empire on the whole."

"Now that you mentioned it, you did say the farmlands in the south is important."

"... But I never imagined that the impact on market prices would be so staggering. We can requisite for food locally if the war dragged on, but it looks like we can't stall any longer."

Altina shrugged.

"It will be great if Lieutenant General Dorval could escape together with the rations."

"... That's right."

She stood up.

"Alright! Let's get to work! We need to repel the Etruria Theocracy as soon as possible so the citizens can dine in peace!"

This was very spontaneous, but many officers responded to her.

"Vive la 'Généralissime! Vive L'Empire!" "Victory is within our grasps!" "I want to eat bread with fruit jam!"

Altina thrust out her fist.

"Good answer! Then gather at the main gate after finishing your meal! Let's start training!"

Although most of them answered "Yes Mdm!", there were some who moaned "Ehhh...".

And of course, Regis belonged to the latter.

The officers hastily wolfed down the meat in their plates.

The mess was already noisy when Regis came, and it became even noisier as they finished up their meal and left like a hurricane.

After all, one of the duties of soldiers is to maintain an orderly formation as they wait for the arrival of the commander, so this was a chance for them to show off the results of their training.

Altina stood up after finishing her tea.

"What is it, Regis? You are still not done yet?"

"Oh... I'm just thinking about something."

The others already left.

"Well, never mind. Drop by later okay?"

"Understood."

Altina left the mess, and her Escort Officer Eric followed.

Regis stared at his empty plate and muttered to himself.

"... Is that possible?"

Regis quickly returned to his room.

He picked up a quill and wrote a letter on a parchment, then swiftly sealed it with his stamp.

He then left the room.

And almost ran into someone in the corridor.

"Ahh."

"Hyaa?!"

The one who let out a cute cry was a beautiful young girl with blonde hair and blue eyes— Elise Archibald. They brought her along as a guest to the south upon Bastian's request.

"Ahh, pardon me. I have something urgent."

"Are you in a rush? I'm very sorry."

"... No no, it's not that urgent that I need to startle a lady. My deep apologies."

Regis straightened his posture.

Even though she looked like a child, she was of extraordinary noble birth. She was hiding her identity now though.

"Fufu, Lord Regis is still the same as always, I can't tell that you're a soldier with your attitude."

"Haha... I'm often told that."

"Will the war be starting again?"

Elise looked at the fort from the windows along the corridor.

"Hmm? Oh, that's just training."

They could see the Fourth Army.

It was getting dark, but they could still see the unit marching and turning at each command.

— All units, forward march!!

On the sound of the bugles, 7,000 infantries marched forth.

— To the right, turn!

The bugles played another tune, and they turned to the right and marched.

Regis sighed in admiration.

"How impressive... Their order was a mess when they left the capital."

"I don't really understand this... What good is making everyone moving together like that? I can only see this inflating the ego of the commander."

"... If the unit's formation is not orderly, there will be weak spots in the face of an enemy's charge. When the companions around you fall, you will have to face two or three enemies alone, right."

"And so?"

"In order to maintain a tidy formation when we engage the enemy, we need to train the army to march in steps."

"I thought the soldiers from the Belgarian empire can take on a hundred men alone?"

"... Huh?"

"That's the feeling I get from Bastian, aren't the other Belgarians the same?"

"... He is a special case."

"Ah, just as I thought."

— Take on a hundred men alone? What happened? What did the Third Prince do in the neighbouring country?

Elise looked out the window melancholically.

"... I'm afraid of war. Soldiers will probably laugh at me."

"Not at all, I'm scared of it too."

"Really?"

"... In war, people die if they are killed. Death has always been terrifying to me."

"Then why do you fight a war?"

"... Because if we don't fight, more people will die."

Although not all wars were like that.

Elise lowered her head.

"Indeed, when you are facing an enemy invasion, the only option is to fight."

"Well, it's true during an invasion... But when a nation gets into trouble, that would be a good opportunity for the neighbouring countries to invade it. I hope all the countries can build a cordial relationship and support each other instead."

"Ah, you mentioned the same thing in Professeur Bourguine's house, you're a pacifist."

"Yes, I am."

"I hope my country can be like that too."

"... I'm relieved that you said that."

"I feel at ease knowing that Lord Regis who is in such a position thinks so too."

Neither of them was smiling, but they still locked eyes.

Elise showed a sorrowful face.

"Even in my home nation High Brittania, there are many who opposes the war. But it still broke out in the end. Even if it is in the interest and prosperity of the home nation... People are losing their lives for money..."

Regis shook his head.

"His Majesty Latreille said something like that too. But starting a war for the sake of economic development is a lie."

"Huh?!"

"... Using war to stimulate advances in technology and make the nation prosper is a false theory. History has already proven that."

"But I heard that the products we used in our daily lives used to be tools during times of war?"

"These things are trivial compared to the intangible wealth lost in war. An economy that develops in a decade of peace can match the economic growth in a century of war."

"Is that true?"

"... A nation that wars constantly is a nation where even children need to practice swordsmanship. Compare that to a country that focuses on academics, and opens trade routes with other nations. Isn't it obvious which nation will better develop its economy?"

"Ah, such nations do exist."

It had been several decades since High Britannia's last war, and they concentrated their efforts on the economy. In contrast, the Belgaria Empire was embroiled in constant warfare.

And the result was more developed manufacturing industries in High Britannia, and the speed of their economic growth was even faster than the Belgaria Empire which had several times the territory.

If they hadn't started a rash war, they could probably rule over the surrounding nations economically in the near future.

"... In the wars between nations, the losses suffered will get greater in the future. With the advent of rifles, war will no longer be a contest of might, but literally killing each other. A ruler who still wants to start a war in such a situation will drown in their delusions of grandeur."

"Ah..."

"Or maybe, they just want to cover up their domestic failures by deceiving the public and diverting their attention."

"What do you mean by deceiving?"

"... The duty of politics is the distribution of wealth. Be it public facilities, the development of industries or social welfare, all these are wealth. However, the upper class held on to this wealth stubbornly, so the middle and lower-class citizens will feel unhappy and bear a grudge. If unhappiness continues to pile up, the opposition of the current regime will grow stronger. During this time, the ruler will create an enemy— If they have a common enemy, people will unite easily, more likely to come to a collective consensus, and struck down most criticism."

The young girl who was going to become a ruler turned pale.

"It is the responsibility to soothe the unhappiness of the people."

"... It's not easy to quell the unhappiness of the people. It's like dividing eight pizzas between ten people. Compared to that, branding a neighbouring country 'evil' is much easier."

"How can they do that!?"

"... They don't even need to produce the evidence against the enemy, and just need to make something up. If they tell the people about a foreign enemy, the ruler will easily gain the support of the masses, unite the citizens and dismiss anyone who opposes as unpatriotic— What an ideal country that will be, at least for dishonest rulers."

Elise clenched her fist.

"Did Margaret waged a war against the Belgarian Empire because of that!?"

"... She was just carrying out the will of those in power. During the war between the High Britannia Kingdom and the Belgarian Empire, how many plans to distribute wealth fairly had been discarded, how many citizens that needed aid has been abandoned, and how many voices that criticises the regime has been silenced?"

"I... I'm so vexed."

Her eyes were moist.



He didn't think that it would make her cry.

"... Most rulers would aspire to work towards an ideal country in the beginning. But fair policies will be obstructed by those who already had vested interests, and they would be dragged down by the limitless demands of the public. In the end, they would depend on the illusion of a 'common enemy'. If a ruler spent more time criticizing the flaws of other nations than the solutions of domestic issues, then it is certain that the ruler just needed an enemy to secure his own status and position."

Am I going too far— Regis wondered uneasily.

However, Elise's expression was clearly filled with determination.

She wiped the corners of her eyes.

"Thank you very much. I will keep Lord Regis' words in mind."

"... Ah, no... This isn't something that I thought up, I'm just regurgitating something I read from books."

Regis scratched his head, bowed, then hurried on to the Fourth Army that had started training.

Chapter 3: The Battle of Aroe Maroe

Imperial Year 851 September 15th —

The rainy season had ended several days ago. While the defenders were wondering why the Etruria Theocracy still hadn't attacked, they finally showed up.

"The enemy army numbers 30,000!"

The scout shouted.

All the staff officers were gathered in the conference hall inside the Aroe Maroe fort.

There was a large table in the middle of the hall.

Altina stood at the very end of the room, and didn't sit even though there were vacant seats.

Seeing their commander-in-chief on her feet, the others also remained standing.

Regis stood to her left.

Eric was on guard with a rifle behind her.

Standing to the right was Lieutenant General Dorval and the key officers of the Sixth Army. Lieutenant General Rockhoward and the officers from the Eighth Army stood at the other end of the table.

Eddie and Abidal Evra were present too, and stood to Regis' left.

With their help, a large map was laid open.

"I thought we wouldn't need this... So they came in the end."

"And with larger numbers."

Eddie mumbled.

Lieutenant General Dorval stared at him.

Speaking of which, when they were suppressing the rebellion of Earl Trosa, Eddie was assigned to the Sixth Army.

And he didn't have any achievements to show for it.

It seemed that Eddie left a bad impression on him. After all, he had never seen Eddie's prominent performance.

Regis placed three blue pieces on the map.

They were heading straight for Aroe Maroe City from the south.

"... They will enter the arrow range from the wall tomorrow."

As a broad enemy detection network had been set up, they grasped the battle situation swiftly.

Altina crossed her arms.

"They don't seem to be planning any sneak attack."

"... They are planning a straightforward invasion. Their victory so far probably boosted their confidence a lot."

Dorval who gifted these victories to the enemy didn't seem to mind at all.

As there had been wins and losses throughout the various wars, he probably felt that he wouldn't be punished for something of this extent.

He was known as an "experienced brave general" in the capital, but this term wasn't associated with "many victories".

Since the commander was like that, the troops from the Sixth Army didn't seem too bothered either.

— Well, there was no point in deploying soldiers who didn't have the will to fight to the frontlines.

Rockhoward asked:

"Why has the enemy increased in number??"

"Ehh? That's because..."

They must be reinforcements sent in the past month.

The answer was too obvious, which made it hard to discern his intentions.

Altina answered:

"They are reinforcements from their home nation, right?"

"Hmm, I see. They have been winning the battles, yet they are still sending in reinforcements... The enemy commander sure is cautious."

"That seems to be the case—"

— Wrong, he committed his reserves for the sake of this decisive battle?

They felt that the Imperial army wouldn't retreat any further.

That was what Regis thought, but he decided to ignore it since Rockhoward didn't seem to have any deep intentions.

Even if he was bothered by the increase in enemy numbers, there was nothing to gain from discussing the reason. At least, this wasn't something they should be discussing right now.

Their priority should be how to deal with this problem.

"Hmm..."

Anyway, Rockhoward's focus point was a little strange.

As if he had the habit of acting on whatever came to mind.

There was something he couldn't say to the commander of an army and the head of an aristocratic house. That he was "just like a kid".

Regis sighed in his heart.

Dorval didn't have the will to fight, and Rockhoward's thinking was too shallow.

However, the Fourth Army's forces were less than half that of the enemy. So the Sixth Army would need to contribute too.

Regis asked:

".....Lieutenant General Dorval, do you have any good plans in mind?"

"Hmm? Well... the Imperial Army has 50,000 men while the enemy has 30,000. It will be fine if we defend the fort."

"... A steady plan. How long would we defend for?"

He thought for a brief moment.

"How long to defend... Until they retreat of course!"

"... I see."

Then victory would be eluded forever from the defender's hand.

According to the strategy books, the forts should be defended for an adequate amount of time, and they should attack when the enemy was tired.

Or until reinforcements arrive.

There were other factors involved this time too.

And Eddie stated this factor in the form of a question.

"If we keep defending the fort, but the enemy doesn't attack, what then?"

Dorval showed an impatient face.

"Then there won't be any war, won't that be just swell?"

"Hmm? There are 50,000 Imperial soldiers and many citizens. The food supply brought by the Fourth Army will last for 2 months at most, correct?"

Eddie tilted his head.

According to Regis' calculations, that was roughly right. If they ration their supplies, they would last for four months at the most.

"Then hurry and evacuate the citizens."

"Can we make it in time?"

"You are still the same! You keep pointing out the problems in the plans of others, why don't you tell us your plan!"

Eddie scratched his head.

"Well, that's true."

— Even though there wasn't an alternative plan, these issues would still be there. This plan still needed to be discussed.

Altina pushed the discussion forward:

"Regis, you decide."

— That will be faster, huh.

The scene of continuing the discussion, getting the staff officers to concur, and go into battle with high morale was too idealistic.

Regis suddenly noticed.

That he was under great pressure.

Such a situation wasn't rare either.

With this in mind...

— Ah, it's because I commanded the First Army before. The difference is too big.

Latreille's subordinates were hardened soldiers who were ready to lay down their lives. They would readily die to defend their country.

Regis realized that his thinking was too idealistic.

He remembered what Altina said before, and cautioned himself:

"That's how the local armies are."

Regis sorted out his thoughts and proposed a battle plan.

"... The enemy thinks that Aroe Maroe City is the site of the decisive battle. We can deduce this since they committed their reserves here. I probably don't need to say this, but mobilizing 10,000 soldiers will require massive funding and

preparations. The Etruria Theocracy plans to win this battle and claim the south of the Belgaria Empire as their own territory for the long term.

— it's easy to tell their intention to redraw the borders."

"I won't let them have their way!"

The staff officers nodded when they heard Altina say that.

So did Regis.

"... That's right. So my proposal for this battle is not to defend the fort, but to engage them on the plains."

"Ehhh?!"

The one surprised by that was Altina.

She and Regis heard from Inspector Frank what actually happened during the defense of Sembione.

It was retarded of Rockhoward to propose leaving the base— the one who said that was Regis himself.

The others were shocked too.

Including Rockhoward who lost because of such a plan some time ago.

"Sir Strategist is still young. Even if we have the advantage in numbers, it's better for us to defend the fort. If not, we won't be able to react if any unforeseen circumstance happens."

— Like a fire accident?

It would be too uncouth to ask them that.

Regis nodded.

"... Why don't we leave the responsibility of defending Aroe Maroe City to Lieutenant General Rockhoward's Eighth Army?"

"What?!"

"... Didn't you point out that we should defend our base, Lieutenant General Sir? Then it is only right to leave this responsibility to the unit most concerned about this issue."

"Hmm... But when the evaluation for winning this battle happens, the Eighth Army will be criticized for just holding the fort, I can't accept this proposal as a general."

His concern was actually the evaluation after winning the battle.

Was this the right attitude as a soldier...

Or was this the epitome of selfishness...?

As expected, the focus point of this man is weird— Regis thought once again.

"... Please don't worry. The arrogant Ministry of Military Affairs that mete out rewards and punishment based on rumours had been dissolved, and Her Highness, the Généralissime has taken over their responsibilities. She is a person who fully understands the importance of defending the fort in a battle like this. Isn't that right, Madam Généralissime?"

"Hmm? You're talking about me?"

She wasn't used to being addressed as Madam Généralissime.

Altina nodded.

"Yes! Of course I understand! Holding the fort is very important."

"You mean it is of the greatest importance?"

"Ehh? Probably... Ah, of course, holding the fort is of the greatest importance!"

She changed her tone when she saw Regis' face.

After hearing Altina say that, Rockhoward's face eased a little.

"If I will be evaluated fairly, then I can go into battle at ease. Please leave the

responsibility of defending Aroe Maroe City to the Eighth Army! No matter how many enemies there are, we won't let them take a single step in!"

Inspector Frank who was at the tail end of the Eighth Army's staff officers seat smiled wryly.

Excluding the unreliable commander's unit from the battlefield— he saw through Regis' intent.

But this wasn't just getting rid of the hassle.

He planned to allocate more troops on defending the fort.

If they were attacked from behind when they leave the base to engage the enemy, their morale would be affected, which would lead to confusion.

It was a scheme Regis often used— and if the enemy commander was capable too, they would do the same thing.

Regis wasn't the only one who would use unexpected tactics, so he had to wary of the enemy doing so too.

For the sake of the troops' morale, it was worth it to assign 20,000 men to the defence of Aroe Maroe City.

Dorval asked worriedly:

"In that case, we will have to fight the enemy of 30,000 with less than 30,000 men on our side...?"

"... That's true in terms of numbers."

"Isn't that too reckless?"

"... The Imperial soldiers are elites. We have similar numbers, so it's hard to imagine us losing to the theocracy army with reserves mixed in. And the Sixth Army has gotten plenty of rest."

"No no, we actually have a lot of wounded, so just resting for a week or two wouldn't be enough."

"... I understand. Then, the Fourth Army will stay in front, while the Sixth Army will be at the back."

Regis placed a red chess piece and a yellow chess piece on the map.

The red piece representing the Fourth Army was in front.

The yellow Sixth Army was behind.

"Hmm."

Dorval looked troubled, but it was common knowledge that the Belgarian empire 'would never lose in a fight with equal numbers'.

And the facts did show that the Imperial Army had rarely lost any battles when the forces were equally matched.

Altina puffed her chest out.

"The Fourth Army is strong enough that we wouldn't lose even if the opponent is the first army! It will be a piece of cake!"

"... That's right. The Sixth Army might not have the chance to fight at all, but do stay on your toes."

Dorval continued to think about it.

"In that case, it will be fine too."

He didn't want to offend the Généralissime if he resisted taking to the field too hard— That was probably what he thought.

Dorval nodded reluctantly.

The next morning—

It was a plain with no end in sight.

The morning sun casted long shadows from the city.

The Fourth Army formed up at the edge of the shadow, about 50Ar (3573m) to the west of Aroe Maroe City.

They were positioned horizontally to face the enemy coming from the south.

To the left of the unit was a wide river.

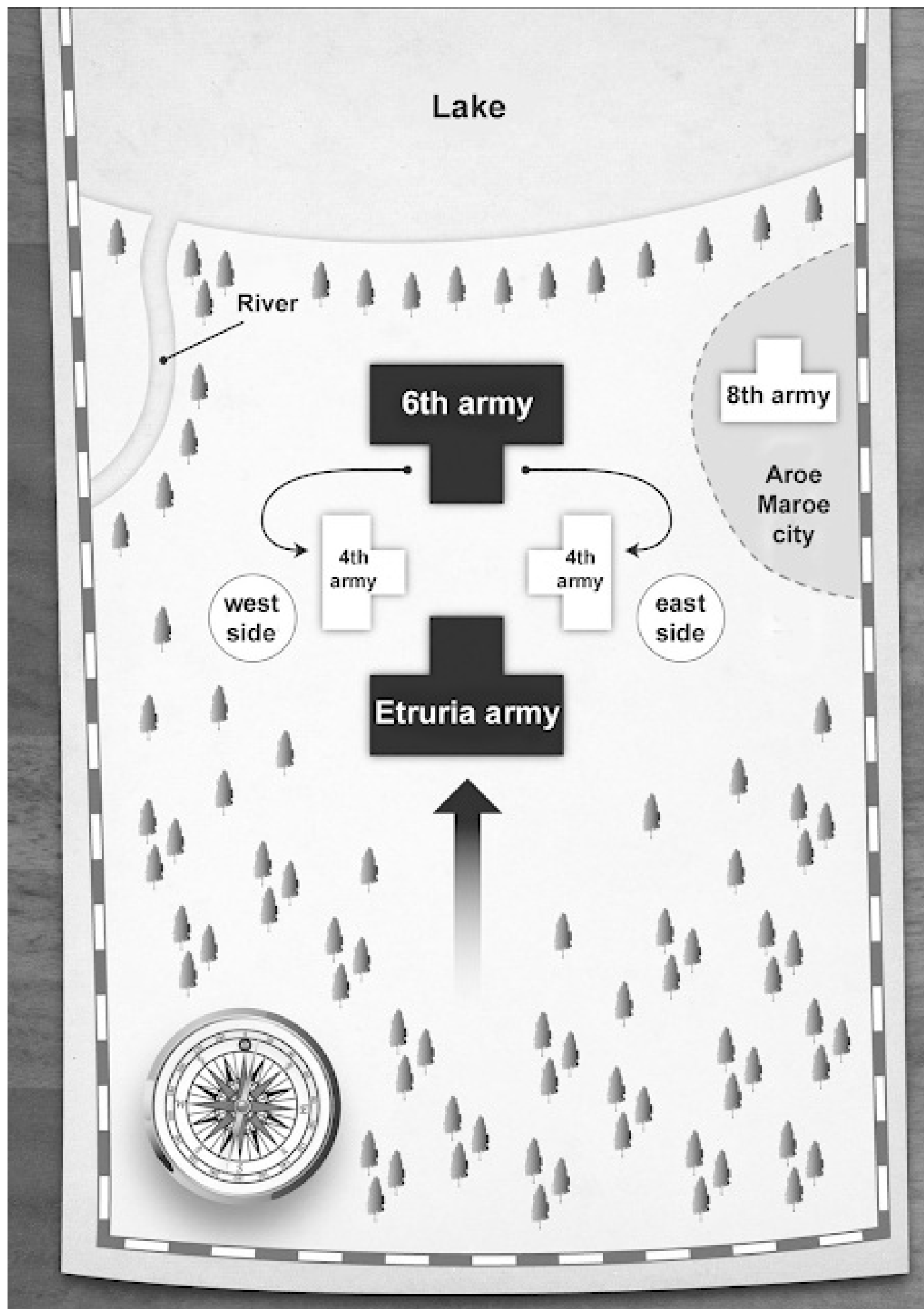
The Sixth Army commanded by Lieutenant General Dorval was deployed behind the Fourth Army.

As they weren't at the very frontlines, the veterans of the Sixth Army were all very laxed.

Behind them—

Further to the north, there was a large pond.

Before them was the enemy, to the right was the river, to their left was Aroe Maroe City, and to their backs was the pond— that was how they were positioned.



Fourth Army headquarters.

Altina was riding on a horse.

Regis was mounted on a horse and standing to the side— although Eric was the one holding the reins.

Regis couldn't ride a horse, but he couldn't keep riding together with the commander. He also needed to make a show of it at times.

Eddie came.

"Yo Regis. We are neither too near nor far from the city, aren't we?"

"... That's right."

"Our artillery won't reach, but they can still see the battle clearly. Is the fort a part of the battlefield? Or is this place just a bit close to the city, so they should concentrate on the battle on the plains?"

"... It will be a success if the enemy commander notices that."

"Oh—? So it's fine either way?"

"... This is a battle on the plains."

He didn't plan for the 20,000 troops of the Eighth Army that were defending Aroe Maroe City to attack. Regis couldn't ignore their existence, but he didn't need to account for them in his plan.

Regis explained:

"... There is no point in adding in troops that can't coordinate with us. It's better for them to defend the base."

"That's unexpected. Regis thinks the Dorval of the Sixth Army is more useful than Rockhoward from the Eighth Army."

"... Yes."

"But the Sixth Army probably won't cooperate either. They don't like to jog around."

"... The bulk of the Sixth Army are veterans with plenty of experience. They should be quite capable in a fight."

According to the military records, they had quite a number of engagements.

But their losses were minimal, which proved their excellent command structure and tenacity as a unit.

Eddie shrugged.

"But fighting spirit is the most important thing, right? Those guys pushed all the fighting to the Fourth Army.

"... That's true, it's about time to get them motivated. After all, defending the south is the responsibility of the Sixth Army."

"You have a plan? Like giving them bonuses?"

"... Unfortunately, even after becoming the Office of the Généralissime, this unit is still poor. Most of the armies in the Belgarian Empire are funded by the nobles themselves. And we don't have that much money."

Altina's mother was also a commoner. Although she was a royal, she didn't have access to much funds either.

Just the Fourth Army alone had 8,000 men.

If you include the guards working in the 《Office of the Généralissime Administration Building》 in the capital, the unit despatched to the east and the defenders left in Fort Volks, they numbered over 20,000 men.

And the Seventh Army might be rostered under their command too.

The Sixth and Eighth Army might be assigned under Altina's command too, so their numbers would grow to 70,000.

They also need to consider other expenses too.

Regis' face turned pale just thinking about it.

"... Ughhh... We are really running out of money."

"H-Hey."

"... Ah, it's fine. Even without money, I have a thousand ways to spur motivation from the soldiers."

A messenger ran over.

And got down on one knee before Altina.

"The enemy is heading right for us!"

She nodded.

"Just as Regis thought!"

"... Well, this isn't strictly a 'prediction', but an 'inevitability'."

Is that really true? Eric asked.

"Actually, I'm a little worried... The enemy might not come at us, but head for Aroe Maroe City instead."

"... In that case, we will win if we strike the back of the Etruria Theocracy army, right?"

The front of a unit might be strong, but their rear and side would usually be weak.

How could they make the retarded mistake of exposing their rear to the main forces of the Belgarian Army? The enemy commander definitely understood such common sense.

Things were going well.

Eric pondered.

"When fighting alone, if an enemy attack from the side, the only choice is to turn and engage."

"... If they expect the enemy to attack from the side and plan for it, that won't be too much of a hassle. It's the unexpected turn of events that gets you."

"Hmm?"

Eric didn't participate in many battles involving many large units.

And his unit had never been attacked from the flanks or the rear. Soldiers who experienced that and survive were either extremely lucky, or possess exceptional prowess.

Regis pointed to the back.

"... Let's make an assumption. Let's say the Sixth Army is attacked from behind. Well, behind them is a lake, so that will never happen."

And of course, he already checked the lake before deploying the troops.

Eric tilted his head.

"In such a situation, the Sixth Army will need to turn around and engage the enemy right?"

"At the same time, the enemy before us will also attack. There are 30,000 enemy soldiers before them, and an unknown number to their rear. How many people should turn and engage the enemy?"

"Hmm—... How about half of the Sixth Army positioned at the back, 10,000 of them engaging the enemy?"

"... Conveying such an order will take 5 minutes. During this time, there will be soldiers who turn back or move forth on their own... They would be soldiers who panic and mess up the formation after seeing the enemy attack. How many troops will be lost before they regain order?"

"Hmmm... then we should decide ahead of time on what to do if the enemy attacks our flank."

"Yes, you are right. With enough training, the soldiers won't panic even in the face of a surprise attack. Alright, let's put it all together then. Look around you."

"Yes."

This was the center of the Fourth Army, and soldiers in tidy formation were all around them.

As this was near the headquarters, the troops were formed up neatly as if they were measured with a ruler.

Eric tilted his head, and Regis said:

"... See the distance between each of them, they are almost standing shoulder to shoulder right? Like I mentioned before, if there are gaps in the formation, a soldier will need to face two or three enemies at once."

"Ah, that's right! Infantry has to form tight formations."

"Yes... A tighter formation is stronger, which will give an advantage in numbers locally. Alright, regarding the issue of a surprise attack. What if we let this unit turn to one side?"

"Ahh?!"

When humans walk, their arms and legs would swing. They couldn't move shoulder to shoulder, so they need space to their front and back.

It was difficult for a unit to turn in a certain direction.

Regis added:

"And of course, we have been conducting training to change our formation... But it is impossible to switch our direction so swiftly in battle. Do you know how much time is needed to reorganize the formation of 10,000 men?"

"It's exactly as you say!"

"... No matter what, the soldier's morale will plummet if they are attacked from the flanks or the rear. The fault will lie with the tactics of the commander. Troops that had lost their will to fight can never win."

Morale was important.

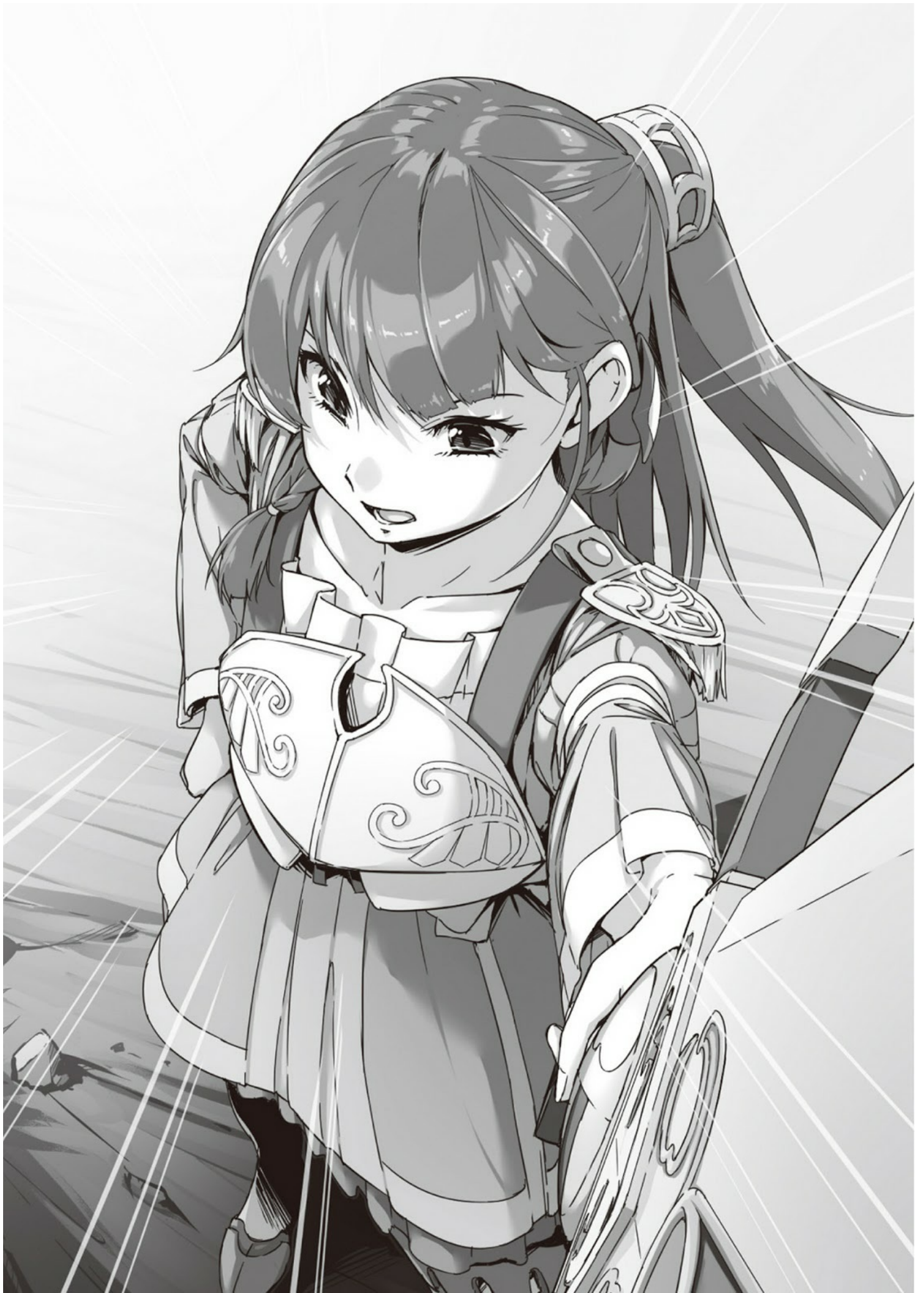
"The enemy is only 4 Ar (286m) away!"

When he heard what the messenger said, Regis raised a hand.

"Your Highness!"

Altina thrust her giant sword into the sky.

"Rifle team, fire!!"



The soldiers at the front rank lifted their brand new rifles. It was the rifle Latreille once showed Regis.

It was the new Belgian made rifle, the «Fusil 851».

Compared to the prototype, its design was simpler, the gun was longer and lighter on the whole.

On Altina orders, bugles were sounded.

The captain of the rifle team shouted:

"Fire!!"

The soldiers holding the new rifles pulled their triggers.

The stopper mechanism was released, and spring-loaded hammer hit the firing pin into the chamber.

The firing pin pierced the firing cap behind the paper bullet, and created a spark. The gunpowder caught fire, and created an explosion.

At this moment, the air that would normally be vented from the spring hammer mechanism was stopped by the rubber ring. Hence, the 《Fusil 851》 was more powerful than the rifles of other nations.

The bullet at the tip of the shell casing spun along the grooves inside the barrel and flew out.

The order to fire was given at 4 Ar (286m), but this was only done to ease in the soldiers who were used to the old muskets.

In fact, the 《Fusil 851》 rifle's effective range was 14 Ar (1000m).

Bang bang bang! The gunshots overlapped each other.

Numerous bullets flew out.

Splat splat splat, the soldiers of the Etruria Theocracy fell one by one. They were hit at a distance where their faces weren't even discernible. It was more powerful than muskets and easier to reload. Another round could be loaded in no time.

The battle report was sent to the headquarters swiftly.

"The rifle team fell one hundred enemy soldiers!"

Uwah! The staff officers cheered.

Altina also nodded.

"Well done!"

"... That's right."

Regis forced himself to calm down and think.

The new 《Fusil 851》 rifle was sent to the Fourth Army just three days ago, and there were just 200 of them.

The rifle team at the first rank had been preparing for a long time, but they were still a team put together hastily.

— It's impressive for them to reach 50% accuracy at such a distance.

After adequate training, they would be able to hit with high accuracy at the intended distance of 14 Ar (1000m).

If they excluded incompetent examples like Regis.

Shortly after, reports that the "Etruria army has started to charge!" was received.

At this distance, they will engage the enemy between a minute and a half to two minutes.

If it were the old muskets, even well-trained soldiers could fire just one more shot... But the new rifles could fire four more times.

However, even with four more shots, they could only take down around 400 more soldiers. Even with the new rifles, two hundred of them weren't enough to affect the grand scheme of things.

— At least 2,000 rifles are needed for it to be effective here.

"This is enough for the experiment. Pull the rifle team back."

"Understood! Pull back the rifle team!"

The bugle soldier blew a different tune.

The rifle team at the first rank should be withdrawing to the back.

— I'm overstepping my authority again.

This was turning gradually into the custom of the Fourth Army.

Before the battle, Regis will give advice and Altina will issue an order. The messenger will then be despatched, and the bugles sounded.

But once battle has started, Regis' words would be executed directly as an order.

After all, if they follow the due process, many soldiers would be hurt because of this delay.

And Altina wished more than anyone else for the orders to be relayed quickly.

"Regis! It's starting!"

She shouted.

"Yes... I see it."

No matter how many times he saw it, his heart would be filled with bitterness and discomfort.

The Etruria Theocracy charged in, and the Fourth Army engaged them.

Many men were shouting.

Lances were thrust forth.

Their killing intent clashed.

Many people were stabbed, bled and died.

Regis raised a hand.

The deafening roars at the front ranks drown out all messages. But this order had been issued beforehand, and the bugles sounded out loudly.

The frontlines of the Belgarian Fourth Army started to split.

The unit split into two from the middle, just like cheese breaking in half.

The Etruria army charge right in, like a hot knife cutting through butter.

They were moving with such momentum that they could very well reach the

headquarters.

Regis sat on Eric's horse.

"Uwahh... s-slow down a little."

"We will get caught!"

"Then don't gallop too fast."

He was ignored.

As the shaking was too intense, Regis was almost thrown off a few times.

— I will definitely die if I fell off the horse, right?

He started imagining what the world after death would be like. There probably weren't any books in heaven. The thought of that spurred his courage to do live on.

He couldn't die before reading that book. Be it a part of an incomplete series, or new works slated for release.

Eric shouted:

"Sir Regis, the unit to our rear is being attacked!"

"Please hurry!"

That was all he could say.

He suddenly realized.

The girl with vermillion hair and her horse that should be in front of him was gone.

"... Where's Altina?!"

"Ehh?! Ahh?!"

He calmed down and searched, and heard her voice from behind.

She was swinging her sword.

"Hyyyaaaa—!!"

It was unbelievable. As a royal, a Généralissime and the commander-in-chief, she was engaging the enemy at the rear of the retreating unit.

She wielded her giant sword with both hands.

"I won't let you get your way!"

Her attack from the back of her horse broke all of the enemy's spears.

Judging from this battle, she had gotten even stronger.

She used to judge that Latreille was better than her in swordsmanship, and

Jerome on a horse with a lance was stronger than her.

But how would the current Altina fare against them?

Wielding the giant sword as if it was a normal one, such a scene felt as unreal as a B-grade play.

She was swift.

And that was enough to exert overwhelming power.

Even if the enemy's quality wasn't high, this was enough to show how strong Altina was.

The Belgarian soldier around her regained their morale.

"Don't let the enemy near the Princess!""Hit them back!""Let them see the tenacity of the Empire!"

Regis was flustered.

— It will be troubling if you all work too hard!

"Your Highness!"

He shouted.

Her hearing was acute even in this messy battle. When she noticed him, she reorganized the unit as she slowly backed away to headquarters.

"Regis, are you alright?!"

"I think my lifespan has been cut. What are you doing at the back?!"

"I can't abandon our fellow soldiers who are in a pinch!"

"... But that's our plan."

The Fourth Army splitting into two was part of the plan.

The Etruria Theocracy army had already broken through.

The headquarters had gotten away. The soldiers of the Fourth Army had also separated to the left and right.

And in front of the enemy—

Was the Sixth Army.

For an army of 10,000, the distance between ranks would be very long.

When the front ranks engaged the enemy, the rear ranks could get rather boring. They could still hear the battle cries, screams and clashing of weapons, as well as the bloodthirst in the air too.

After becoming a veteran, one could sense that they wouldn't be engaging the enemy anytime soon.

There didn't seem to be any arrows or bullets flying over.

The soldiers of the Sixth Army had gotten used to the battlefield, and there were even some chatting idly with each other.

The atmosphere was similar to friends drinking coffee in the city.

"Ahh, you mean the restaurant in the corner of the city? No, the oil there isn't good."

"As I thought! I felt like taking a shit when I left there."

"Why did you visit that place so many times?"

"Well, it became a habit before I knew it."

"Don't shit yourself here."

They would be lectured if the officers heard them, so they kept their voices

down. But there was still a few whose shoulders shook whilst snickering.

The sounds of battle in front of them were growing intense.

It seemed that the battle was getting heated.

A soldier said with an annoyed face:

"Since they are reputed to be heroes and elites, just let the Fourth Army fight by themselves."

"Well, they have 8,000 men and cavalry, so they should be able to take out half of the Etruria army."

"If they took on that many casualties, won't they retreat?"

"You sure are optimistic—"

"Ahh—... I want to drink beer."

"Or rather, I feel unmotivated without beer."

"It's hot."

"Don't say it, dumbass. You'll make it feel even hotter."

"Really? Then I'm going to keep saying it."

"Shut up, jerkface, shut your mouth."

"Hey, don't be so loud, the platoon commander will hear us."

"Haha... It's fine, the sound from the front is much louder."

"... Hey, isn't it getting too loud?"

When one of them said that, the people around them all look shocked.

"It's true."

"It's gradually getting louder..."

"Are they getting closer?"

They noticed something was amiss before the enemy got here.

The Fourth Army split to the left and right.

And the Etruria Theocracy army charged forth with their lances.

"Wahhhhh—!!"

"Huh?!"

The soldiers at the first rank of the Sixth Army screamed and backed away.

But behind them was an army of 20,000.

And behind the 20,000 soldiers was a vast lake.

Even if the soldiers in front could pull back, the entire army couldn't withdraw.

A terrible report reached the headquarters of the Sixth Army.

"The Fourth Army has been defeated! The Etruria Theocracy army is heading right for us!!"

"What?!"

Dorval spat.

The staff officers stood up in shock.

"General, p-please retreat!"

"Retard!! There's a lake behind us!"

They weren't deployed near the lake at the start. But the soldiers who had grasped the situation backed away on their own, and the units at the back were almost pushed into the lake.

Even though the soldiers were lightly armoured, they would drown if they fell into the water. This was different from swimming in the lake during the summer.

The other staff officers said:

"Retrograde to the east!"

They were cut off to the west by the river, but to their east were plains. And if they moved a bit further, they would reach the fort.

Let's go back to the fort and reorganize— such a consensus formed.

But they couldn't do so.

"The path is blocked by the cavalry from the Fourth Army!"

When he heard this report, Dorval lashed out:

"What the hell are they doing?!"

"I don't know either..."

He was just a messenger.

A staff officer suddenly realized:

"Speaking of which, that strategist was the one who deployed us as the reserves..."

Dorval stamped the ground violently.

"He planned for this right from the beginning!? That despicable brat!!"

No clear orders were issued out.

"The front ranks have engaged the enemy!", the battle reports continued to pour in.

The chaos was about to cause a rout— there was such a possibility, but these weren't weak soldiers.

They were regulars in the Belgaria Empire.

And the bulk of them were veterans.

When they saw the spears of the Etruria Theocracy army closing in on them, their expression changed.

"Go!!"

They braced their shields.

These were usually used for deflecting arrows, but the troops in the Sixth Army used them to cover half their body, and block the spears at an angle.

The spears slid away from the smooth wooden shields.

They slid upwards.

The momentum of the charge didn't slow at all, and the distance between the two continued to close.

On the other hand, the Sixth Army preferred spears that were just slightly taller than them, which was considered short for this era.

The spears from the rear ranks thrust out at the approaching enemy from the gap between the shields.

"Hyahh!"

"Uwahh?!"

The Etruria soldiers who were about to draw their swords fell.

On the other hand, there were instances where the shield didn't block the attack completely, and the soldiers were stabbed.

When the front ranks fell, the next rank would need to fill in the gaps immediately. But doing so without any preparations would just end up with the replacement being killed immediately.

The soldiers to the left and right need to keep the enemy in check and push them back.

Only then could the soldier use this chance to fill in the gap.

Even though the Sixth Army backed away because of the confusion in the beginning, they displayed a steady style of combat once they engaged the enemy.

Regis watched the battle unfold from his mount.

"... As expected of the Sixth Army made up of veterans. They reorganized themselves in no time."

"They are really tough."

Eric sighed as he watched the same scene.

"... After taking the first hit with their shields, they forced the fight to a stalemate. Those shield soldiers are incredible. They are just like an iron wall."

Even though the Etruria Army's charge was ferocious, the Sixth Army's formation didn't have any holes.

The Sixth Army's front ranks held.

The way those bulky soldiers formed a line with their large shields were just like a wall.

"... Incredible. I have seen quite a number of units, but none of them have a formation as tough as them. In terms of prowess as infantry, they might be even better than the First Army."

"There are no weak points at all!"

Eric commented in awe:

"... Normally, the first rank will retreat after tanking the enemy's charge, leaving the next rank to hold the line. That was necessary to dissipate the momentum of the charge in stages. However, the Sixth Army didn't relent at all, just like a steel wall."

However, there was a lake behind them, which was why they couldn't retreat...

But no matter what reasons there may be, it wasn't a simple matter of fighting on a whim.

Every one of them was very capable.

And now, the Etruria army that charged in was the one in chaos.

The enemy front ranks they should have broken through were still holding, and forcing them to a standstill.

That led to the ranks behind them that were still charging crashing into their own front ranks.

It was hard to fight at full strength when you were squeezed by your own allies from behind. There were some who got pushed out of position, resulting in their formation breaking up.

As Regis wasn't used to riding a horse, he couldn't shrug. He thought calmly and said:

"... What are the platoon leaders of the Etruria Army doing? It is their responsibility to keep the formation in line, right?"

In the Belgaria Empire, even officers that were commoners had to learn to command ten to a hundred people in the Military Academy.

Which was equivalent to a squad leader or platoon commander.

Only nobles could learn how to command a thousand or more men, commoners had no chance to learn that.

Eric who was riding in front asked:

"Sir Regis, did you learn how to command 10,000 men before? I heard that exceptionally gifted commoners would also have the privilege of being instructed as potential staff officers."

"... I had never received such training."

"Ehh, that is surprising. So you only learned how to command a hundred men?"

"... No, not at all. I have never learned how to command units in the Military Academy."

"Ehh?! But why?!"

"... After all, I couldn't even ride a horse, so there was no point in teaching me all that."

"Ahh..."

In the Bulgarian Empire, commanders needed to be mounted on a horse to exercise their command. Leaving squad leaders aside, it was mandatory for platoon commanders in charge of a hundred men to learn horse riding.

His results in tactics were outstanding, but the instructors still told him

mockingly to “practice riding a horse first”.

And the result of avoiding riding lessons and continuing to read led to such a result.

Regis raised the corners of his lips.

"... My aspiration was being an administrative officer in the rear. I wanted to perform administrative tasks and organize the logistics."

His goal was actually to work in a military library.

Even now, he still yearns for it.

And after becoming the strategist for the Office of the Généralissime, that path was sealed.

— Farewell, my dream job of being surrounded by books

Altina's voice pulled him back to reality.

"Regis! What should we do?!"

"... It's about time to counterattack."

The bugles sounded again.

The Fourth Army that had split to either side turned together.

This had been conveyed to the officers ahead of time, and the soldiers had been trained, so they formed up again in no time.

As the headquarters were in the eastern half, the orders were relayed to the western half through flags. Hence, the movements on the western half lagged behind a little.

It wasn't a big issue.

"... If we were just fleeing to either side, the Etruria Army will pursue us. And when our backs are attacked, it will turn into a rout. However, the Sixth Army is in front of the enemy."

Altina who was mounted on a horse beside him nodded.

"Because they couldn't just ignore them."

"... Well, that's an army of 20,000, a few times larger than the Fourth Army fleeing to the side— no matter how you slice it, they are the ones that looked more like the main forces."

The Etruria army didn't neglect to deal with the biggest threat, so they didn't change direction to attack the enemies to their sides.

The enemy still understood such a basic concept. That was why Regis could predict the policy behind their commands.

It was too easy to see through them.

And now, a new situation appeared on the battlefield.

The Sixth Army (20,000) with their backs to the lakes stopped the assault of the Etruria army (30,000).

The two halves of the Fourth Army (4,000 each) were facing the enemy's flanks.

Altina swung her sword.

"Charge!!"

The Etruria army suffered serious losses on their flanks.

Regis bit his lips.

"... They are not pulling back huh."

"Ehh?"

It was soft, but Eric still heard Regis' mumbling. Regis said as if answering to himself.

"... When half surrounded, the easiest way to resolve this is for the entire unit to pull back. They can then decide which side they should focus their attack on. It's not easy to command 30,000 men like this, but if they don't do so, their flanks will be exposed to attacks."

"That's right."

"... Most commanders can only order attacks or retreats. I think they should issue more complicated orders."

"I have only seen bugles that can issue such a variety of orders in the Fourth Army."

"... I think that should be the minimum standard."

"“We are pulling back but not fleeing, and will be moving to the left and right instead”, is there a specific bugle tune for that?"

"... The ideal situation is to let the entire unit move as one entity."

The situation was gradually improving.

The Etruria Army was in chaos because of the attack on their flanks.

Regis exhaled.

It appears that he didn't need to do anything more.

He just needed to leave the rest to Altina and the other officers. It wouldn't be long before the Etruria Theocracy army surrenders.

That was supposed to happen.

Altina turned around and said in surprise:

"Regis, something is happening!"

"... Ehh?"

When he heard her say that, Regis turned and looked too.

The headquarters were in the eastern half of the Fourth Army right now.

And a strange situation was happening at their rear.

He could see cavalry.

— Are they Belgarian!? No, the Flying Sparrow Knights should be deployed to the east of the Sixth Army, and they shouldn't have moved.

Was it an ambush by the enemy?!

A messenger ran over.

"Our rear has been attacked, and our formation is in disarray!"

Regis almost fell off his horse.

A sneak attack?!

He felt as if his heart was being squeezed tightly by a devil.

Chapter 4: The Price of Betrayal

This was the flaw of moving the headquarters drastically during battle.

The plan was similar to the tactics used by the High Britannian Kingdom. Splitting your unit in half in the face of the enemy's charge, and lure them in deep before surrounding them.

Other than the fact that they didn't have large quantities of the new model of rifles, there weren't any significant differences.

But letting the Sixth Army bear the brunt of the Etruria Army's charge was the exception.

Back then, Regis used a cavalry charge to counter High Britannia's tactics.

When the headquarters were shifting, relaying orders became difficult.

No matter how wide the enemy detection network was, it was useless if the reports couldn't make it to headquarters.

And now, Regis was in the same situation.

— We are attacked by a cavalry charge when our security is at its weakest!

He clicked his tongue.

"Just where did they come from...?!"

He despatched adequate amount of scouts to prevent anything unexpected from happening, and he even knew how the enemy was deployed.

The messenger got down on one knee.

"T-The... The ones attacking us is the cavalry form the Eighth Army!"

"... W-What?!"

Altina yelled in anger.

"Did they turn on us?!"

Her bellow struck fear even in the experienced soldiers around her.

The messenger trembled and said:

"I-I don't know!"

— A turncoat and sneak attack? Were they colluding with the Etruria Theocracy all this time?

He thought back to Rockhoward's behaviour.

Was all his retarded speech just an act?

Was he trying to lower their guard by pretending to be incompetent?

What should we do?!

There wasn't enough time.

He had to decide now!

Regis browsed the shelves in his mind at blistering speed.

He chose a book from countless others, and flipped the pages quickly.

"... The western half of the Fourth Army are to advance to the south."

He gave the orders.

Eric said in surprise:

"Shouldn't they head north?!"

"... Yes, they will be supported by the Sixth Army if they head north."

"That's right."

"... What if the Sixth Army rebel too?"

"How could that be?!"

"I'm just considering the worst scenarios."

— In that case, the enemy would be the Etruria Theocracy army of 30,000, The Sixth Army 20,000 and the Eighth Army's 20,000, totaling 70,000. There's only 8,000 on our side, and we are split into two halves.

If Altina could escape, it would be a blessing in such a disaster.

Cold sweat broke out on his back.

Regis continued issuing orders.

"Instruct the Flying Sparrow Knights at the east of the Sixth Army to stop the

cavalry attacking our rear..."

No, this is too weird.

Regis who was racking his brain for a counter-strategy spoke to his other self who was observing the battle from another perspective.

— This is too unlikely.

He thought carefully.

If the Eighth Army and Rockhoward really want to betray the Empire, he didn't need to do so at this moment.

Wouldn't it be easier for him to storm the rooms of the key personnel with heavy infantry while we were still in the Aroe Maroe city?

And if he really rebelled, the family and relatives of the commander and his staff officers couldn't remain unscathed.

They would probably be executed.

The harshest punishment of the Belgaria Empire was awaiting them. It was hard to believe that the Etruria Theocracy could offer anything enticing enough for them to turn traitor.

Was their treason so hard to believe?

Then what was their intention in attacking our rear?

Did they really have a reason to rebel, that Regis couldn't even imagine? Or maybe they just decided on that?

By right, Regis should issue the order to attack without hesitation.

"Ughh... "

"Regis?!"

He could hear Altina calling him.

He must protect this girl.

At the same time, he had faith that this girl with her excellent swordsmanship would not lose to those knights.

"... The Flying Sparrow Knights are to standby! We will stop the Eighth Army at headquarters!"

"Are we going into battle?!"

"... I'm sorry, I'm counting on you."

"Ah, no problem!"

The noise behind him was getting louder.

The cavalry pushed aside the ranks and were closing in.

Without a doubt, they were the cavalry of the Belgarian Empire. They wore the emblem of the Eighth Army on their chest.

Fast.

Although the soldiers of the Fourth Army falling into chaos was part of the reason, they reached the headquarters since its distance from the rear guard was relatively short.

And Rockhoward himself was leading the charge!

"Uwhooooaaa—!!"

Damn fool! Altina raised his sword.

She yelled:

"You unforgivable traitor! I will teach you a lesson!"

Finally, the Eighth Army's cavalry broke through into the headquarters.

Rockhoward held his spear up high.

"Madam Généralissime, are you alright!?"

"Hah?"

Altina turned stiff.

Regis' mind also turned blank.

Altina said blankly.

"Ehh...?"

With her sword ready to slash at Rockhoward raised high, she was frozen like a statue.

The Lieutenant General exhaled in relief.

"I'm relieved to see that you are okay."

"W... What?"

"I saw from the walls that the Fourth Army had been routed, so I rushed here to assist! I'm glad I made it in time! Leave the rest to the Eighth Army!"

"....."

Facing such an unexpected reason, Altina was speechless.

Regis was the same.

With the encirclement on the east side collapsing, the Etruria Army could reorganize themselves.

The enemy commander who gained some brief respite, regained control of the units around him.

The units that had restored order helped the other soldiers build up a defense line.

The Etruria Army retreated.

About 30 percent of the enemy forces had fallen.

That was to be expected.

If they pursue now, the Belgaria Empire would need to pay a heavy price too.

Moments ago, it was just a matter of time before the enemy had to surrender.

Regis felt that his voice wasn't his own.

"... Do not pursue too deeply... Reorganize the troops."

The messenger nodded with a pained expression, and blew a rather sad tune. It was a victory, but it felt like a defeat.

Rockhoward spoke again:

"Madam Généralissime, the enemy is getting away!"

"That's right."

"My cavalry is ready! Please give the orders to pursue!"

"....."

"I will definitely cut off the enemy commander's head!"

She was so energetic earlier, but she now looked as if she had been working without sleep for three nights in a row.

Rockhoward's idiotic behaviour far surpassed any precedence, and had reached an unimaginable level.

How incredibly moronic.

She finally managed to speak.

"My orders are for the Eighth Army to defend the fort, correct? You were supposed to protect, and not attack. Correct?"

"Yes, Madam! I made the call that the commander-in-chief was in danger!"

"But the Fourth Army didn't signal you for aid."

"You didn't! But we must protect you! Madam Généralissime is a very important person for the Empire."

"....."

She was speechless again.

Regis continued the conversation.

"... Why did you charge in from the rear of the Fourth Army? If you are here to reinforce our position, there should be other ways to do so right?"

Rockhoward made a dumbfounded expression.

"This is for the sake of getting to the side of the Madam Généralissime faster."

"... And the result of your actions, is that the Etruria Army that was about to surrender, is now retreating easily."

"Yes, they judged that they can't win after my army joined the fray, so they retreated. It's not strange at all."

"... What are you saying? The battle had already been decided, but the enemy has now gotten away because of the chaos at our rear."

Rockhoward used the tone of a teacher and said:

"Isn't it fine if we win?"

"... No, that's not what I mean... Do you know how many soldiers lost their lives to create this encirclement?"

"Hahaha! Sir Strategist, you sure are obsessed over strange things. So you are saying that I stole your war merit?"

"... You went against orders and still dare say it is a war merit?!"

"I prefer the term flexible!"

Rockhoward shrugged. He really thought that Regis was nagging because of war merits.

Altina thrust her sword down.

It struck the ground.

It shook the earth.

What happened? The soldiers around them all looked their way.

Under everyone's watchful eyes, Altina jumped.

Like an eagle soaring through the sky.

"You stupid retard——!!"

She sent a flying kick towards Rockhoward.

"Ahh?!"

Rockhoward fell off his horse.

And rolled onto the floor.

Wah! The soldiers watching took a step back, forming a human wall.

Altina walked towards Rockhoward who lay sprawled on the ground.

Her eyes were filled with intense fury.

"Because you violated orders, the victory that was in our grasp got away! And you are not even reflecting on your mistakes! Not only did you act without orders, you are hopelessly incompetent! You don't have the qualification to command an army!"

"Ughh... My face... was kicked...?!"

Rockhoward nursed his nose.

He said in a quivering voice:

"Even if you are a royal, this is unforgivable! I'm the head of a Marquis house!"

Altina replied in a louder voice.

"Who cares! In my capacity as the Généralissime, I hereby declare— you are dismissed from your appointment as the commander of the Eighth Army!"

"Ahh—?! Alright then! Most of the soldiers from the Eighth Army are soldiers hired privately by me! I will bring them all back!"

"Get lost!"

Altina was absolutely infuriated.

Regis felt his brain cooling down quickly. Probably because his rage had been vented out by Altina.

He stood in front of Rockhoward.

"... Well then, the Eighth Army is hereby disbanded, and the commander is relieved of his appointment. However, please take responsibility for this incident."

"What?! How dare a chevalier talk to me, a Marquis, with so little respect!"

"... No, this is with regards to the military. I'm speaking to you as the strategist working under the Office of the Généralissime. I hope you can do your final duty as the commander of the Eighth Army."

"Final duty?"

"... Violating military orders is punishable by death, don't you know that, Lieutenant General Sir?"

Rockhoward's face turned pale.

"I-Impossible... I'm a Marquis. And I'm from the west... And I'm from the third faction, who supports the Princess, you know?!"

"Surely you jest. We have no records of any support given by the Rockhoward Marquis house."

"No, that's... I mean taking to the field personally as the head of the house. I sincerely hope for your success! That's my support."

Altina pulled out her sword that was thrust into the ground.

The air and sand flew with the blade.

"It's too late!"

"Wait! Please wait, Madam Généralissime! M-My mind is just filled with the urge to save you..."

Regis shook his head.

"... Your mind is just filled with your desire to increase your fame."

"Everyone thinks like that, right?!"

"... Not really. I have never craved recognition."

Regis said coldly. Rockhoward ignored all those sacrifices for the sake of his desires, and wasn't even aware of that.

Ignorance itself wasn't a sin. But just like soldiers who neglect training would

die on the battlefield and farmers who slack on their farms would have poor harvest, commanders who neglect in their studies had to be punished.

He couldn't be forgiven just because he was a noble.

Altina thrust out her sword.

"Rockhoward!!"

Her sword was pointed right at his nose.

"Ahh?!"

"Your desires resulted in the valiant sacrifices of many soldiers to be in vain. Take responsibility for disobeying orders."

"Gaa... Ugg... Ughhh."

His face turned green and then red. Blood was dripping from the tip of his nose, and sweat was flowing from his brow.

At this moment, from the human wall—

A man walked out.

"Pardon my intrusion."

A smile appeared on his elegant mouth. It was Inspector Frank Ignatius de Duran.

Altina didn't move and asked:

"What is it?"

Frank shrugged.

"This is my work. Can you let me handle the rest?"

"The Ministry of Military Affairs was dissolved. What right do you have, a man

not part of any enforcement agency, to punish this man?"

"Actually, my transfer orders have been completed... My mission is to investigate Rockhoward in secret. And the conclusion is that he has violated the orders of a superior officer, with no room for debate."

"Mission... Where have you been transferred to?"

Frank took out an epaulette from his pocket.

"The national Military Police Department that has just been reorganized. As a public official that supervises the citizens for unlawful activities, our jurisdiction includes high ranking military officers. We have been working with empty titles for a long period of time, but we have now been reorganized as per the direction of the New Emperor Latreille."

"Military Police Department...?!"

Altina tilted her head.

Regis knew of the existence of such a unit, but he never thought they would be reorganized.

"So, this department is formed to supervise high ranking military officers and aristocrats..."

"That's a misconception, we won't discriminate against anyone. But of course, our priority will be on personnel with huge influence and authority, that would have a great impact on the nation."

He winked.

"... How will you deal with Lord Rockhoward?"

"He will be arrested and brought back to the capital. He will be judged according to his crimes, and pay a large amount of compensation to the country and Madam Généralissime."

"... That will be adequate."

So it would be solved with money— it wasn't that surprising, since powerful nobles could be bailed out with cash if they were ever thrown in prison.

Even the justice system in this country was biased towards the nobles.

As long as they had money, they could get away with anything.

Altina looked unhappy.

Frank soothed her:

"I will explain to the officers of the Eighth Army. He is still the commander, and compared to the Madam Généralissime who kicked his face, it will be easier for me to explain. I will work hard to seek the understanding of his subordinates."

"If they were loyal enough to their master to the extent of getting mad at me, why didn't they stop his simple-minded actions!"

What she said was true.

Regis concurred with Frank's proposal.

"... I will leave it to you. They're welcome to transfer to the Fourth Army... But

there's no need to force those who aren't willing."

If the people unhappy about the way Rockhoward was treated were forcefully transferred to the Fourth Army, it would lead to more trouble than it was worth.

Altina didn't object either.

She kept her sword.

"If Regis is fine with it, then it's all good."

Frank bowed his head.

"Thank you for your kind understanding. Well then— please leave the rest to the National Military Police Department."

Several soldiers wearing the same armband as him walked over, and pulled up Rockhoward who was on the ground.

"If you resist, we will charge you with treason. Please keep that in mind."

"Ugghh... Unhand me! I will walk by myself!"

His eyes were filled with hatred. But Regis was getting used to being hated by grand nobles.

Regis started thinking about the next issue.

— That side is even more troublesome.

They couldn't leave the fort to the Eighth Army, since their relationship had fractured.

Before news of this major incident made it back, the Fourth Army returned to Aroe Maroe city.

They gathered Rockhoward's subordinates, the key officers of the Eighth Army in the courtyard.

Frank informed them of what happened.

Would they be infuriated by the fact that their master was arrested...
Surprisingly it didn't matter.

One officer said:

"... I can't guess what the head will do at any time."

"So he has always acted like this?"

The officer nodded in response to Frank's question:

"Hmm, how should I put this... He has a habit of forgetting about other things when he focuses on one matter."

Maybe it would be better to say that his ability to concentrate on one thing was extraordinary.

So he didn't seem suited to be a commander, Frank commented frankly.

"The Eighth Army is disbanded, and the Rockhoward house will be forced to pay an enormous sum of compensation money. There isn't any law that forbids aristocrats from raising their own army, but it will be difficult for him to maintain his current forces."

"What should we do...?"

"As a member of the National Military Police Department, I couldn't be of any assistance."

Frank was working directly under the Emperor, and his position was close to that of the First Army. However, the First Army was an elite unit.

And the Eighth Army never had any outstanding battle records, so these soldiers wouldn't be accepted into the First Army.

The Ministry of Military Affairs probably could arrange for a unit for them to transfer to, but that ministry had been dissolved.

And the First Army had taken over this role. Although they were disciplined,

their numbers were limited, and probably didn't have the time to take care of all these loose ends.

Which meant, there was a good chance the Eighth Army's soldiers would just be ignored.

"H-How could this be..."

The officers looked at each other.

One of them vented his thoughts.

"I have been unhappy about this from the very beginning! My grandfather also worked under him, but the tactics, equipment and training are always the same, and there are no presentable war results to speak of! And now, we even have to shoulder the infamy of disobeying orders."

"Speaking of which... I heard the guys from the Fourth Army say that although the Office of the Généralissime has been set up, their number of regular soldiers are still lacking."

When they heard that, the others started chattering.

"Didn't they hire mercenaries some time ago?"

"But they are still less than 10,000 strong."

"They have sent detachments to the northern and eastern front..."

"But the soldiers working directly under the Madam Généralissime are limited in number, right?"

"I heard that scrawny strategist say there were plans to "increase the number of regulars"."

"Alright, let's give it a try!"

It seems that the commander of the Eighth Army was less popular than expected.

There wasn't anyone concerned with Rockhoward's punishment, lest those who plead to reduce his sentence. Most of the officers left the courtyard.

The majority of them were planning to transfer to the Fourth Army.

Only a few elderly men were left.

Frank asked:

"What are your plans?"

"Ehh... We are past the age of seeking fame and fortune, so we will just retire back to our hometown. If the current Emperor requires our services, we will still offer him our swords."

"I'm impressed by your sense of loyalty."

"... The previous Emperor has also been kind to us."

"Maybe I don't need to say this... knights nowadays strive for fame and fortune, and place less priority on fealty. Compared to them, I feel that you all are the real knights."

The old officers shook their heads.

"We are just too old to serve a new master. Lord Military constable, the Rockhoward Marquis house served the royal family since the times of the L'Empereur Flamme. The current head might be retarded, but he definitely had no intention of committing treason. Please be lenient on his sentencing."

Seeing them lower their heads, Frank replied solemnly:

"This humble one will relay your words to His Majesty."

During the same time, in a different venue—

The large conference hall big enough to seat tens of people had only two occupants.

One of them was Regis.

The other was the commander of the Sixth Army, Lieutenant General Dorval.

Altina wasn't here.

Both of them didn't have escorts as they had something confidential to discuss— Regis was the one who proposed this meeting.

It seemed the other party had something to say about the recent battle.

The word "Rage" seemed to be carved onto Dorval's forehead.

"What the hell is that, explain it right now!"

Regis spoke without being fazed.

"... With the assistance of the Sixth Army, we defeated the Etruria Army. Unfortunately, our encirclement was broken because of the recklessness of the Eighth Army."

"I'm not asking about the Eighth Army! I'm talking about making my army the shield in this battle! I never heard about this?!"

"... There were no such plans. In the face of the enemy's charge, the unit in front got through. This is a common occurrence. That is the reason why your unit is deployed to our rear."

"Eight thousand soldiers splitting cleanly into two halves is not common at all! This must be planned ahead of time!"

"... But even so, that is still the decision made by the Généralissime, the commander-in-chief. Soldiers standing on the battlefield can't blame anyone just because they had to engage the enemy, correct?"

Half of what he said was false.

This was planned by Regis, not Altina.

And of course, there was no need to say all that.

Dorval didn't accept this explanation.

"I have nothing to say if this is really the decision of the commander-in-chief! But can you earn the trust of the soldiers with the way you command?!"

"... Trust, huh."

If Altina heard that, she might agree with Dorval.

That was why he didn't let her come.

Because this conversation wasn't just about the battle.

Dorval cautioned him painstakingly:

"You are too young! I admit that this scheme was splendid, but if you lose the trust of your troops, you won't be able to command properly as a general!"

"... I will keep that in mind. By the way, since we are talking about trust, what about you, Lieutenant General Sir?"

"What did you say!?"

"... After seeing the Etruria Army clashing head-on with the Sixth Army, I confirmed one thing. You can win even if your numbers are evenly matched with the enemy."

Dorval's shoulders shook in laughter.

"Fufu... I was wondering what you wanted to say... Luck plays a part in victory and losses too."

"... It was clear from the records of the previous battles as well. The Sixth Army might have lost, but you didn't lose any men. This feels like you are losing on purpose."

Regis said confidently.

Dorval shook his head.

"That's because the condition of our men and the enemy were different from today. It's not something anyone who has never been in long campaigns will understand."

"... You are saying you didn't forfeit without a fight on purpose?"

"Of course! Why would I do that!? I have no reason to! Why would I lose to

the Etruria Army on purpose!?"

"... The result is that seven forts and Sembione city fell into enemy hands."

"The Sixth Army will take part in the campaign to reclaim these lost territories! Don't get cocky just because you are called a hero! Don't think there won't be consequences for making baseless slander against my reputation!"

He said aggressively.

In the past, Regis might stop due to fear.

He just needed to speak his mind honestly. This was nothing compared to the battlefield where tens of thousands of lives were at stake.

He had faced the murderous intent of the Black Knight Jerome, the Mercenary King Gilbert, and the New Emperor Latreille in the past.

Even though Regis was as weak as a puppy, he could still make comparison between the people he had met.

——Lieutenant General Dorval was nothing.

Regis didn't even break a sweat.

He asked:

"... Where are the rations that should be stowed in the forts?"

Dorval smirked:

"What are you talking about...? Unfortunately, those rations have fallen into the hands of Etruria. You want me to compensate these losses? But I protected the lives of the citizens. Or are you saying that wheat is more important than human lives?"

"... Talking about something that seems relevant but actually isn't, will just divert the point. I'm talking about the rations. You can compare the difference between wheat and human lives next time."

"It is relevant!"

"... I will say this again. This is about the rations. Now, where are they?"

"I said Etruria has them!"

"... We already got the testimony from the Etruria officers we captured that the “warehouses were empty”."

"Hmmp! Are you asking me something so ridiculous because of the ramblings of an enemy soldier!? Stop joking with me!"

Regis nodded.

"... One of the Princess' backers is House Tiraso Laverde. A competent house that united all the new nobles in the south. Lieutenant General Dorval who is garrisoned in the south for such a long period time must know about them."

"Yes, I met them before."

"... Do you know that they control the merchants in the south too?"

"Hmm? I didn't know that, I just heard that they are wealthy merchants..."

What has that got to do with the rations..."

Dorval showed a detested expression.

Regis looked at the vast farmlands outside the window.

The land was slowly being dyed a deep shade of red.

"... By allowing the Etruria Army to take the fort and invading successfully, the food supply zones were lost, the price of wheat and vegetables skyrocket. And there's also the Hispania Empire's pirate roaming the sea."

"Aren't you talking about rations?!"

"... The current price has reached its peak."

Regis stared at Dorval.

A bellow that seemed to be coming from the earth resounded:

"Do you have any proof, brat?!"

It was a smile that looked just like the devil on religious paintings.

And of course, he was prepared when he entered the lion's den.

Regis took out a parchment.

"... This is the list of the merchants who trade frequently with the Sixth Army. I have marked those who have traded alcohol and items of clothing that wouldn't be traded normally.... What do you think, Lieutenant General Dorval?"

"Ughh...?!"

His lips were trembling.

"Do you know? Emperor Latreille has reorganized the National Military Police Department. Should I let them investigate the account books of these questionable merchants? Well then, Lieutenant General Dorval... Let me ask you again. Where are the rations from the forts?"

"Ughh... Ughh... You... You damn brat!!"

Dorval held the hilt of the sword on his waist.

Regis narrowed his eyes.

"... You admit it?"

Dorval sighed deeply.

"As expected of you. You actually saw through it."

"... It's such a shame."

"Yes, such a shame. My hands... Will be the one to kill the hero who saved the Empire!!"

"Lieutenant General Dorval?!"

"I will kill you, then throw you and that dull piece of parchment into the

bottom of a lake!!"

Dorval drew his blade.

"Uwah?!"

Regis backed away.

But it was futile in the face of such a brutish act.

He might have faced many powerful men, have gotten used to their killing intent and intimidating aura, but his frail body that couldn't wield a sword remained unchanged.

— I'm gonna die?!

"Regis—?!"

With a shout, the door of the conference hall was broken.

The thick doors were crushed by Altina's sword, 《Grand Tonnerre Quatre》.

Shreds of wood were scattered all over the floor.

A dark shadow charged in.

It was Eddie.

The blade of his 《Defendre Sept》 drew near.

"Dorval!!"

"Don't forget your honorifics, retard!"

The blade swung with a cry—

And shattered before it reached Eddie.



Duke Eddie Fabio de Balzac was incredibly skilled in breaking his enemy's weapon.

He shattered Dorval's sword in one hit.

The hands of the Lieutenant General were shaking.

"Ughh... you are actually that strong...?!"

"I'm the head of a house bestowed with the sword of the Emperor after all."

Dorval opened his eyes wide when he heard what Eddie said.

"You damn brat! You didn't show any results when you were working under me!"

"Didn't I tell you? I hate the sight of blood."

Dorval who was holding the bladeless hilt collapsed to the floor.

"I... What did I do? I merely sold some rations. All the nobles despatched to the frontlines do that."

He mumbled to himself.

He was completely lost.

Phew, Regis who was saved in the nick of time breathed out in relief.

"... That was scary."

Eddie shrugged.

"That's my line. Don't die in a place like this, Regis."

Altina who had smashed the door walked over with her sword on her shoulder.

"Really now! You made us wait outside— I left it to you to handle, but wasn't

that dangerous!?"

"... Sigh... I never thought he would slash at me out of the blue."

"Naive! You are too naive!"

"... That's right."

Even Eddie was saying that.

"No matter how high the status of a criminal, there are no distinctions in their actions. Both bandits and nobles will act the same way."

"... I will be careful in the future."

Regis' gaze fell onto Dorval.

"... Actually, I just want the Lieutenant General to admit his mistake and turn over a new leaf. I didn't mean for matters to blow up."

Altina sighed again.

"I didn't think I will say these words to two generals in one day."

"Ughh..."

Dorval sighed.

But it was already too late.

She announced:

"In the name of the Généralissime— I hereby relieve you of your appointment as the commander of the Imperial Sixth Army!"

He hung his balding head low.

The sentries patrolling the fort rushed over after hearing the disturbance.

"What happened!? The door is broken!? What's going on?!"

Regis lifted his hand and stopped Altina who wanted to tell them what transpired here.

"... It's thieves. Probably soldiers from the Etruria Theocracy. They might have infiltrated the city. Strengthen the security. Even Lieutenant General Dorval got injured."

"What!"

And of course, all these were lies.

There weren't any thieves or casualties.

However, the soldiers relayed this news to the others. They would strengthen the security within the fort.

Regis asked Eddie to perform another task.

"... Please move Dorval to a room quickly. Keep watch over him, don't let anyone in."

That meant confining him.

Eddie nodded.

"Understood. But it will be best to get someone to take over me soon. I don't want to be alone with Dorval for too long."

"I understand."

Finally, only Regis and Altina were left in the conference hall.

She asked:

"Are you really not hurt?"

"I'm fine."

"Hey Regis— Why didn't you hand Dorval over to the National Military Police Department immediately?"

"... Because he isn't the mastermind we need to apprehend."

"Ehh?!"

"... Lord Dorval is an aristocrat from central. It will be difficult for him to find merchants that are trustworthy and brave enough to buy stolen military wares, correct?"

"Ahh, that's true."

"... I'm wondering if the merchants were the ones who proposed this. Well, even if that wasn't the case, the people who brought military wares can't be innocent anyway."

"No matter what is the reason, they still bought those wares despite knowing where it came from, right?!"

"... So we shouldn't make the news of Lord Dorval being detained public,

before investigating those merchants."

That would prompt them to destroy the evidence.

He wanted to understand the situation better, that was why he arranged for a private dialogue... Regis never expected to Dorval to cut at him with a sword.

People wouldn't stay still like the pieces on a chessboard.

They would grow anxious.

And lose sight of the big picture.

Or be blinded by greed.

— People were hard to understand.

Altina placed her hands on her hips.

"It can't be helped! There's a pile of things for you to do now. Work hard, Regis!"

Speaking of which, he couldn't fathom how this girl was filled with endless cheer and optimism, how dazzling, admirable and impressive.

No matter how dire the situation might be, she could continue to move forward with determination.

Regis muttered quietly:

"... Thank you."

"Ahahaha! Now now, I already decided that I will protect Regis properly!"

"... Considering the position of a mistress and her subordinates, this is a little weird."

"Regis is too weak after all!"

"Well... I can't refute that... But..."

"That doesn't matter, what should we do next?!"

The next steps.

They should investigate the merchants who might have conducted illegal trades with the Sixth Army.

To avoid having them hide evidence, it would be best to investigate all of them at the same time.

They also needed to scout out the Etruria army's movement. They probably retreated to Sembione city.

So it would be an attack on a fort.

More importantly, Emperor Latreille's intention lies beyond defending their land.

"The next time, we will be invading another country."

Altina pursed her lips when she heard Regis say that.

Chapter 5: The Port City in the Southwest

Imperial Year 851, October 9th—

The sea breeze blowing in from the south felt warm.

This was the port city Tarnoritz, situated to the southwest of the Empire.

As the largest port in the south, many large sail ships were docked here. There was also a shipyard, where the thumping of the hammers could be heard all the time.

As the Chaineboule harbour situated in the west of the Empire was still under repairs, more ships needed to unload their cargo here compared to the past.

Many people unload or load crates and sacks to and from the ships one by one.

Rats scattered as agile cats gave chase, and energetic kids followed behind.

It was a lively city.

The mansion of the Tiraso Laverde Duke clan's main house was situated here.

Instead of the manor of the landlord, it looked more like a giant merchant shop.

It was reputed that anyone who didn't visit this building would have wasted their trip to this city— this shop not only sold miscellaneous goods for daily necessities, there were also decorations, art pieces and even weapons and armour.

Their recent best sellers were medicine from the east.

Three streets away from that luxurious manor.

Regis' group was brought to a guest reception house built with red bricks.

It was a queer building that was a mixture of Belgarian architecture, the neighboring countries... and even displaying cultures from countries across the ocean.

Hispania style pillars and doors, eastern pottery, paintings and sculptures...

This was like a museum of a foreign land.

Regis sighed in awe.

"... Amazing."

"Ahaha! What an interesting place!"

Altina was smiling too.

But Elise hung back reservedly.

They were ushered to the innermost room on the third storey.

Awaiting their arrival was the new head of the Duke clan, Eleanor Ailred Winn de Tirasio Laverde.

"You are finally here, Your Highness."

"We are here to visit, Eleanor"

Both of them had forthright personalities, and were like old friends who had just met.

Eleanor looked Regis' way.

"Sir Regis is here too, huh."

"... Thank you for having me. This is a beautiful house."

"Fufu, do you like it?"

"I do."

"If Sir Regis wishes it, this manor can be yours."

"N-No... That's a bit..."

"I will even throw in my sister Renoir."

"No no no..."

"There are tens of thousands of books collected from overseas in the basement too."

"....."

Only when Altina said:"Hey, Regis?!" did he finally snapped out of it.

He covered it up with a cough.

"Haha... I still have my aspirations and responsibilities."

He said the same thing as before, but Altina still stared at him.

Eleanor said with a wry smile:

"Well, I don't have any ill intentions. Sir Regis, do feel free to take any book you wish to read. After all, the money you helped me earn is enough to buy another shipload."

"Ehh?! That matter has already been settled?!"

"I told you before, right? Getting contracts from royals and nobles is my specialty."

"... But that is still too fast."

"If I dally any longer, others might cut in, so I gave a lot of concessions. I gave a substantial sum of money to the grand noble for the exclusive right to manufacture guns, I also signed a contract with the blacksmith guilds, guaranteeing them an annual technical instruction fee."

"... I see. Spending money without holding back to achieve your goals quickly, that's impressive."

"Can you perform this level of negotiations too, Regis?"

"No... I'm not that good with negotiations."

If I'm smarter, maybe things would have been settled smoothly without needing to disband the Sixth and Eighth Army

— He thought.

That was almost a month ago—

The Sixth Army was disbanded, and most of them returned to the capital.

They had close relations to the grand nobles, and wouldn't be troubled about their next assignment.

Almost all the merchants who helped Dorval embezzle the resources from the army were caught.

However, Regis wasn't directly involved in this, so he only heard the reports.

The National Military Police Department and the staff officers of the Fourth Army coordinated a surprise inspection of seven merchant shops in three business industries.

They found the embezzled goods and evidence of tax evasion, so all of them were arrested.

Some had already fled the Empire, which couldn't be helped...

Dorval was extradited back to the Capital to await his sentencing.

And the Eighth Army's Rockhoward had to pay a heavy sum of compensation money for violating military orders. He even had to sell his house to raise the money, and there was no way he could fund his private army.

Unexpectedly, most of his private army wished to transfer to the Fourth Army.

And the Fourth Army took them all in.

It seemed that their loyalty towards Rockhoward was lower than Regis thought.

After that, the former Eighth Army soldier performed admirably in the battle to liberate the Symbione city from the Etruria Theocracy army.

The battle went as planned—

Attacking a fixed base allowed the new Belgaria Empire artillery and rifles to shine, giving them an overwhelming advantage.

After all, if the opponent remained on the defensive, then the Empire just needed to bombard them from afar.

And now, the Fourth Army's numbers swelled to 20,000.

Elise bode farewell formally.

"I am very grateful for taking care of me."

"We are still waiting for you to repay us. Not with words, but materialistically."

"... Yes."

"It's enough that you remember that. Just strive for your aspirations."

"I will work hard."

She bowed deeply.



Eleanor took out a letter.

"This is new information sent from our relatives living in High Britannia."

"... What is it about!?"

"It will be faster to read it yourself."

She handed the letter to Elise.

"Pardon me!"

She took the letter with quivering hands, and read it anxiously.

Eleanor said to Regis and the others who didn't know the full picture:

"House Tiraso Laverde has a branch house in High Britannia. Marbella is doing business over there."

"Ah, I see... if it's a relative, you can discuss things that are more confidential."

"Fufu... Well, we don't trust each other to such an extent... But they are our biggest business partner."

After a short introduction of the branch family, they went back to the content of the letter.

"The parliament in the High Britannia kingdom has decided to abolish Queen Margaret's reign."

"What?!"

Altina opened her eyes wide.

As expected, that's their decision— Regis thought.

Latreille was planning to invade High Britannia all along. He would never offer terms that the other party could accept.

Those in power in High Britannia had pushed all the responsibility for starting the war onto Margaret.

Eleanor continued:

"The parliament has decided to crown Elizabeth Victoria as their new queen. There are two reasons why this has not been announced officially— One, negotiations with the Belgaria Empire that is holding Margaret have yet to be concluded. High Britannia hopes to work out a peace treaty... Or rather, they are afraid of retributory attacks from the Empire. Another reason is that Elizabeth isn't in the country. It will be strange to announce the coronation of the new queen if the subject herself isn't there."

She looked at Elise.

Regis and Altina also looked at her.

The subject was concentrating on the letter.

As the letter was written in Belgarian, it took quite some time for her to read it.

"... I... didn't make it in time again?"

"The fault doesn't lie with you. Or rather, it is the right decision to leave that chaotic kingdom. If you fell into the hands of the Margaret faction or the anti-monarchy faction, you would be dead."

"Uggh..."

Elise showed a pained expression.

Regis asked:

"... Can you send a ship towards the High Britannia kingdom?"

"Yes. Diplomatically speaking, the two nations are still at war so commuting directly is banned. But the shipping route through a third country has been restored."

"... Is the Hispania Empire the third country?"

"That's the shortest route."

"... You have to do it fast."

Eleanor narrowed her eyes when he heard what Regis said:

"The next target is Hispania?"

"... Yes."

"That is a troubling country, but they are also an important trade partner. Doesn't the Emperor know that?"

"... I think he knows very well."

Regis didn't share the same values as him after all. Latreille thinks just conquering it would be good enough.

Altina pouted unhappily.

"I don't want to invade another country either!"

It couldn't be helped— Regis soothed her. He had said this line plenty of times.

"... If we went against the Emperor's edict, that would be treason."

"I know, we are not ready yet."

"Yes, we have no chance against the First Army right now. Our goal of being at peace with the neighboring countries is for the sake of saving the people. In order to do so, we need to eliminate the division of social classes and war. Overthrowing the current establishment isn't our goal, and the aristocrats aren't our enemy. We must not get our goal and means wrong. Most importantly we can't save anyone with feelings alone."

"I understand. I heard that from you plenty of times already. Even if we receive an order that goes against our ideals, we can't lose our cool."

"... I will be counting on you."

Elise asked with an uneasy expression:

"Your Highness Argentina and Lord Regis will be raising the flag of revolution against the new Emperor Latreille?"

"Of course!"

Altina clenched her fist and nodded firmly.

Regis scratched his head.

"... Please keep this a secret."

"I-I understand! Of course!"

"... Our goal is different from Emperor Latreille. And there will be an obvious flaw in his policies in the near future. If we don't prepare for it, the Empire might be in danger of falling."

Elise seemed to be in deep thought.

"You told me about this... Is there any reason for you to do so?"

As expected, she was sharp.

"... Yes. Actually, we have a favor to ask."

"If it won't affect the High Britannia adversely, I will do my best."

"Well then... I wonder if that will be true? It is hard to judge if this is a good thing for our neighbouring countries. It will be more beneficial for the Belgaria Empire to weaken— from that perspective, this is probably a bad thing. But what if both sides can avoid a war where tens of thousands will die?"

"I think that would be great."

"Wonderful. Then we can work together."

"And your request is...?"

Regis took out a parchment from his pouch. After getting permission from Eleanor, he laid it out on the table.

It was the blueprint of a component.

It showed the scale and dimensions from three directions.

There was also a prototype.

Regis showed the thing on his palm to everyone.

It was a dull grey bullet.

"... As you know, this is a metallic cartridge. However, this is meant for the «Fusil 851»."

He revealed this incredible secret.

However, the three women reacted strangely.

Altina already knew, so she didn't show any reaction.

While Elise and Eleanor weren't familiar with military matters.

Their faces were saying that they didn't understand what the main point was.

If Latreille saw this, he would stand up and kick over a chair in shock.

Regis didn't intend to let him see this ever.

Regis felt troubled that they didn't understand the gravity of this issue, and explained.

"If we use metal cartridges, the 《Fusil 851》 will be more powerful, reliable and accurate. Reloading will be faster too... Ah—... simply put, it will give us an overwhelming advantage."

Elise nodded.

"That sounds incredible."

Looks like I will need to explain properly, Regis organized his thoughts.

Thirty minutes later—

After explaining the fundamentals, she finally understood half of it.

Probably.

Elise frowned and said troubledly.

"Erm... That is to say, the flaw in the Belgaria Empire's rifles is the usage of paper cartridges. If the casing is made of metal, it will bring a lot of benefits."

"Correct."

Regis nodded in reply.

"It is difficult for the Belgaria Empire to make these metal cartridges right now."

Only High Britannia could perform such precise manufacturing. The Empire could probably catch up sometime in the future.

"... It will still need a few years."

Elise stared at the metal cartridge in Regis' hand.

"If it can be mass produced."

"... There are two effects strategically. First, like I said— it will increase the performance of the rifles. We can improve our combat effectiveness without increasing troop numbers. Another thing is that resupply will no longer be an issue. Emperor Latreille intends to prevent any uprising by controlling the supplies of munition."

There was a difference between rifles and weapons like swords and lances in the past.

Munitions could only be mass produced near the capital.

Munitions would be supplied to an army fighting the enemy, but the supply would stop if they turn traitor.

"You want the High Britannia kingdom to ship them over?"

"That is what I hope."

"Can't you manufacture them somewhere in the south?"

"We don't have the press forging technology. We can craft such prototypes slowly, but we would need hundreds of thousands of bullets if a civil war breaks out."

"You need that many?!"

More importantly, they might be found out if they manufacture them locally.

They had to avoid evidence of treason being discovered before they were ready.

Regis took out another paper.

"... And of course, the 《Fusil 851》 can't be used just by putting in the metallic cartridges. This is the component next to the rifle chamber."

"What's the difference?"

"... The paper cartridge will burn away when the shot is fired, but the metallic casing will expand under the explosive forces, which will jam it inside the chambers. It will also be hot after firing, so it can't be touched barehanded. So we need to make a mechanism to eject the casing."

"Eh? Wouldn't paper casing be better than?"

"... Even if the paper got burned, it won't disappear completely, and will leave ashes behind. This will clog up the bolt, and will be harder to clean than ejecting a metal cartridge."

"I see."

By the way, the cartridges are made with brass. It rusts easier than iron, is easier to obtain and can mould without heating it. Even if it gets stuck in the chamber after expanding, it will cool down quickly which makes it easy to eject.

The High Britannia kingdom's brass refining technology was very well developed too.

But the Belgaria Empire mostly treated brass as a decorative material.

"... If Ms Elise is willing to assist us, we can also despatch technicians from the Fourth Army to accompany you. They can also double as your escorts."

"I understand. Instead of bowing down to an authoritative Emperor, I will

prefer a neighbor that supports pacifism. I will help you."

Regis lowered his head.

Altina extended her right hand.

"Thank you, Elise. Or should I address you by your real name?"

"... No... I'm still not there yet. I haven't even taken a step forward. When I possess the status that befits it, I will introduce myself to you again."

"I will wait for you!"

"And I will do my best."

They shook hands firmly.

Neither was the leader of their country.

However, by building such relationships, they might be able to achieve their aspirations one day.

Regis looked at the two of them and felt a fire burning in his chest.

Seeing that the discussion was almost over, Eleanor stood up.

"Alright then, the ship will set sail three days later. Whoever wants to board can just stay in this house. You may leave the manor if you wish... But do be careful. There are still a lot of High Britannians in this city after all."

"Thank you very much for your kind help..."

"I'm a merchant. Compared to war, peace would be more convenient for my business. It's enough for me if you can be of assistance to the Princess."

"... The weapon merchants crave for war though. My home nation was coerced by these people."

"Hmmp... Those people don't know how to do business at all. Can dead customers buy goods?"

"That is true."

Elise nodded and looked out the window.

Outside was the vast ocean.

On the other end of the sea was the kingdom of High Britannia. It was her home, and the place she would need to fight in.

The true battle would be starting for Elise.

And for Altina, the curtains would be drawn for a new battle.

Imperial Year 851 November 3rd—

There was news that the northern part of the Empire was already snowing, but it was just slightly better than summer for the south.

An urgent envoy brought the Emperor's edict.

This was Sembione city.

It was seized by the Etruria Theocracy army for a short time, but the Fourth Army shifted their base of operation in the south here after liberating the city.

The traces of the artillery bombardment could still be seen on the walls and streets.

Inside the hall of the Belgaria Empire style castle.

It seemed that the nobles held a party here every night.

But now, this was now the headquarters for the commander to issue orders and receive messengers.

The decor was the same as before, but things like art pieces had been taken or destroyed by the Etruria Theocracy army.

They might have been sold by Dorval along with the rations too, this was still under investigation.

A messenger from the capital proffered a letter.

Abidal Evra received the letter in the Généralissime's stead and presented it to Altina.

"Mdm."

"Let Regis open it."

That might be rude for the Emperor's edict...

Abidal Evra presented the letter to Regis.

"Sir Strategist."

"... Oh."

Regis took it, checked that the seal was intact, then broke it. He read the edict written on the parchment.

Altina rested her cheek on her palm as she sat in a chair.

"What is it? Will reading the content make me mad?"

"... Let me hold on to it."

It would be a problem if she tore the edict written by the Emperor's own hands in the face of the messenger.

That was how agitated the content of the edict would make her.

Regis stated the content of the edict.

Aside from Altina and Abidal Evra, Eddie, Eric and the other officers were also present in the hall.

He said to everyone:

"The Etruria Theocracy surrendered."

The officers started getting rowdy, but they were in the presence of the commander, and quiet down immediately.

Altina narrowed her eyes.

"Surrendered?"

"... Their main force of 30,000 men were wiped out during the siege of Semblone city. On the other hand, the Imperial forces in the south grew to

60,000 after reinforcements arrived a few days ago."

The Fourth Army under Altina's direct command has 20,000 soldiers.

The newly founded Twelfth and Thirteenth Army had 20,000 men each.

And they were mostly equipped with the new rifles.

Emperor Latreille was serious. He had shown his determination to conquer the surrounding nations within two years.

Altina shrugged.

"The new recruits are still a little lacking. Won't it take some time for us to get up to speed?"

"... It seemed that some of the people in Etruria Theocracy didn't think so. The King who was adamant to resist until the bitter end was killed. There was a coup d'État. The political authority was overturned with military force. Their new leaders have shown their submission to the Belgaria Empire."

Altina nodded.

"Is that so. No matter how it was done... it is great that we can avoid a war."

"... That's true."

Belgaria Empire asked the theocracy to surrender before the invasion.

If they agreed, the rulers of that land would become an aristocrat of the Empire...

If they surrender after war had broken out, what awaited the ruler was a cruel end.

The Etruria Theocracy was estimated to have less than 10,000 soldiers left. There was no way they could fend off the Belgaria Empire's army of 60,000.

Surrendering was a wise choice.

The invasion of the Etruria Theocracy by the Belgaria Empire ended without a single battle.

Regis sighed in his heart.

"Now, let's get to the main issue..."

— Conquer the Hispania Empire.

The fury from Altina seemed to have taken physical form.

Regis soothed her:

"This is an edict, Madam Généralissime."

"I know, I know! It's fine... This isn't the first time we are invading another country. Didn't we take Fort Volks too?"

"... That's right."

The letter already stated that the Hispania Empire had rejected the offer to surrender.

A specific date was also written on it, they had to conquer that nation before April.

It was the same as their order to take Fort Volks from the Varden Archduchy.

The difference was, they had a force of 60,000 now, so strategically wise, it wasn't an unreasonable demand.

There was also the issue of their targets.

— Is this really fine? We will target the cities where the citizens of the enemy are living in.

We will be fighting against the enemy forces in the beginning, but the cities will also be targeted as we keep pushing forward to victory.

Can Altina keep her cool?

Regis thought uneasily.

However, there was nowhere else to go.

Regis said to the envoy from the capital:

"We hear and obey. The Madam Généralissime will attack the Hispania Empire with all available resources she can spare."

The envoy lowered his head respectfully.

"This humble one will return to the capital with Madam Généralissime's reply."

He meant that he will relay to the Emperor that the Madam Généralissime has accepted the orders. Regis might be the one who said that, but he would interpret it as the intent of the commander.

Regis ordered a guard to show the envoy to a room to rest.

Even if brought a terrible edict, the messenger was innocent.

After all, it took him half a month to reach the south, so he would need a good rest before going back.

The reception for the messenger in the hall was over, they now needed to hold a war conference.

Regis went back to his own room.

He already anticipated that invading Hispania Empire was just a matter of time, and had made all sorts of preparation.

He just needed to retrieve the relevant information.

As he reached his chambers, a large man stood at the entrance of his room.

Just a look from him was enough to make Regis shiver.

"....."

"Regis d'Auric."

"... Mr Gilbert, how may I be of service?"

"I heard that you will be attacking the Hispania Empire."

"You sure are well informed. That is so. Ah, let's talk in the room."

Regis opened the door into his room.

Gilbert entered with a serious expression.

"Does both the strategist and the Princess... have no sense of wariness at all?"

"... Only a small number of people are permitted entry here. If I had to be on guard against key staff officers assassinating or betraying us, the organization would be too rigid. So I leave the judgement to the guards."

Regis said as he tidied the papers on the table.

Gilbert closed the door.

"I understand that you put your trust only in specific people. But why trust me?"

"... You have nothing to gain from betraying the Belgaria Empire, right?"

"Maybe I will present the heads of the strategist and princess as a greeting gift to the Hispania Empire— haven't you considered that?"

Regis showed a bitter smile.

"Haha... Even without me, the Belgaria Empire will defeat Hispania. That country isn't a good bet at all."

"You are really confident."

"... I only know some facts. Mr Gilbert has seen the new rifles too, right?"

"That's just a rip off of the High Britannia models."

"Yes, they might be similar, but we can achieve better results than them."

Gilbert said coldly.

"But High Britannia lost."

"... Well, that's true."

He probably didn't think that Hispania would win against Belgaria.

So he had no intention of betraying them at all.

After thinking about the reason he raised this topic, Regis asked:

"... That's not what you want to talk about, correct? That's just some idle chatter to get to know me, huh."

Gilbert showed a face of contempt.

"You are just like Jessica. Quick-witted people sure are annoying."

He actually said his sister who revered her brother so much was 'annoying'.

Jessica sure was pitiful.

Regis shrugged.

"... This is too bloody for idle chatter. Isn't it better to talk about the weather or food instead?"

"I'm not interested in that."

"Okay."

Gilbert crossed his arms and leaned against the wall.

The pillar started to creak.

His eyes turned serious.

"I heard that you and the Princess are pacifists."

"... Yes, that's right."

"But this time, the Belgaria Emperor is ordering you to conquer Hispania... Will you really fight?"

I see, Regis understood now.

He was here to probe the true intentions of the commander.

International relations weren't that simple. There were many situations when those involved wouldn't go all out even when war broke out.

Forcing the war to a stalemate and waiting for mediation was common too.

And the only ones who would be sacrificed in such a war were mercenaries.

Bloodshed was inevitable in battles, but nations wouldn't want to sacrifice their regulars, and would send mercenaries in their stead.

He seemed to be wary about this war being such a farce too.

Regis shook his head.

"... We will take down the Hispania Empire. His Majesty wants us to do so by next year before the snow melts, but I want to complete it by year's end."

"Hmm?! Are you serious?"

"... If you saw what happened in the last battle, you would understand."

"What happened to your ideals?"

"... Well, that's the reality of my position right now."

Gilbert spat and said:

"Are you really such a docile man!? Was your clash with the Prince who was more or less confirmed to be the next Emperor all fake!?"

Regis was surprised.

He thought that Jessica would come up with the battle plan for 《Renard Pendu》, while Gilbert would lead the men on the frontlines...

Gilbert was very smart.

For a combat officer who normally preferred wielding blades to thinking up plans, this was rare.

Regis scratched his head.

"... I'm actually a little worried. Will the Princess change her mind when the time comes? Will she prioritize humane treatments instead?"

"At the very least, she would act differently from you."

"Hmm... How should I put this... my thoughts also revolve around pacifism, so we have to move forward."

"Hmm?!"

"Like I said, for the sake of our ideals, I need to defeat Hispania Empire"

Gilbert gritted his teeth.

"Just like how Jessica speaks. Strategists always talk in such a roundabout manner."

"Ah, sorry about that... Simply put— I think the current establishment in Hispania Empire is an obstacle towards achieving peace with the neighboring countries."

"Ohh?"

"... Because Hispania disguise their navy as pirates, and harass the merchant ships from other nations. They are conducting banditry and fraud on the national stage."

"That's true."

"... Pacifism means that people should be united when faced with a crisis, and not the 'refusal to battle no matter what happens'. That would be impractical."

Gilbert asked curiously:

"You think that Hispania is a 'crisis everyone should overcome together'?"

"... I don't deny that. That nation has already lost its aspiration when it was founded, and is now relegated to a giant criminal organization."

Hispania's territory was once conquered and divided by several powerful nations. After a certain religious group repelled all the foreign forces, they declared their independence. This happened 3 centuries ago.

Back then, all the citizens were devoted to their religion...

They had the belief that the 'citizens of a holy nation should be unsullied and noble', but it had slowly transformed into 'the other countries are not from a holy nation, so violence towards them is permitted by god'.

Regis concluded.

"... I can't ignore the actions of the Hispania Empire."

Gilbert nodded.

"I understand. Let me see your proof in the upcoming battle."

"... Very well."

Since he was willing to take to the battlefield, that meant he believes Regis.

He left with these parting words:

"Keep a tight rein on the Princess."

"Rein..."

She isn't a horse—

Regis who was thinking that slowly understood the implication of his words.

Two weeks later.

It was already mid-November, but it was still warm enough to wear short sleeves.

Regis rolled up the sleeves of his uniform and stood on the battlefield.

"....."

He shut one eye and observed the enemy's formation with a telescope.

As reported, the Hispania Empire deployed a force of only 30,000.

Since the Belgaria Empire had to garrison their fort, only 40,000 men from the Fourth and Thirteenth Army were mobilized.

The terrain was uneven, and the Belgarians had the higher ground.

However, there were large boulders and evergreen trees in the vicinity, so their field of vision wasn't completely clear.

Altina stood beside him.

"The enemy chose this place intentionally, right?"

"... That's right. After so many battles, it's only natural for them to be wary of our firepower."

There were many forts along the mountain range at the nation's borders.

This was a fort built into a hill that made use of the difficult terrain.

However, the same principle in liberating Symbionese city applies here.

They just needed to bombard with artillery from a distance, and the enemy would have to come out from their fort. On an open plain, the Belgaria Empire who had the advantage of numbers wouldn't lose.

Even if they turtle up in their forts, they would just be attacked one-sidedly by cannons and rifles— the Hispania army must have that in mind when they chose to deploy in this rocky region.

A sound judgement.

The bullet paths from the rifles were blocked, and the effectiveness of cannons on open ranks was low.

Altina pulled out the sword behind her.

The metallic 'shink' drew everyone's attention.

"Rifles and cannons can't be used by either side under such conditions, right!?"

"Well, it's not impossible..."

"It can be used?"

"... Not just the rifles, the cannons have been upgraded to the newest model. I think they have their own unique way of being used."

Just as he was about to explain, a report came in saying "there is movement from the enemy!"

"

Regis looked with his telescope.

"Hmm... Looks like they are spreading out and closing in under the cover of the rocks and trees. Not a bad strategy."

"What should we do, Regis? If we fight in a place like this, we will lose if we

don't charge in with momentum. If you don't want to fight, we should withdraw immediately."

Regis thought.

— She looks more and more like a commander.

Altina had experienced many battles, and she had been learning hard, and had gotten better at thinking logically.

Considering her age and circumstances, she was a very bright girl. Maybe she wouldn't need a strategist one day.

"... But leave it to me for now."

"What is it, Regis?"

"... The enemy's strategy is an effective countermeasure against the firepower we showed in the past."

"But what about now?"

"... If a charge is ordered while they are spread out, they won't be able to command effectively. There aren't that many competent officers who can grasp their own position on the battlefield, listen for the command issued through bugles, and give the appropriate orders to their subordinates."

One reason why the army kept their formation was for the sake of relaying orders, so the instructions from the commander could be relayed quickly.

Regis said.

"...Altina, let the cannons fire a volley."

"Is there any meaning in doing that!?"

"I already told them the targets, you just need to give the word."

"If you have prepared to such an extent, you don't really need me to give the order."

"No no... that's not true..."

He didn't tell Altina the plan not because he was looking down on Altina.

But he had prepared several strategies to counter the enemy's movement, and it would take too long to properly explain all those strategies.

Even if he did explain them in detail, she wouldn't remember them all.

Their forces had over 40,000 men. They had more types of soldier than before, and the battlefield was now more complicated.

Altina pouted as if she was throwing a fit, then raised an arm.

"Even if I'm just issuing the order... at least tell me where to shoot, Regis."

"Shoot the obstacle."

"Is there any meaning in doing that?!"

"Well... Let's give it a try. Issue the orders to the artillery soldiers in the front ranks."

They were already informed of their targets.

"Yeah yeah."

She rolled her eyes.

I can't even —

Even though she was thinking that, she didn't refute Regis' proposal.

She took a deep breath, then yelled:

"Front ranks artillery units! Maintain the target! Fire!!"

Upon receiving the order, the bugles sounded.

And then—

The violent sound of the cannons shook the ground.

The sound from rifles were already intimidating, and the boom of numerous cannons had even greater shock and awe.

The soldiers in the frontmost rank had all stuffed their ears with cork.

Two hundred new cannons had been assigned to the Fourth Army.

And they were even more powerful than the High Britannia «41 Elswick cannon». It weighed as much as the mid-sized old model cannons, but had several times the power.

Its name was the «40 Allen cannon».

It was breech loaded like the High Britannia made cannons, but the quality of the steel and gunpowder were different.

They couldn't make tens of thousands of them like rifles, but every single one was built with care and precision. Crafted by the blacksmiths of the Belgaria Empire, it was of a higher quality than the High Britannia model. As the precision of the chambers and cannon body was better, the Imperial cannons were lighter and more powerful despite having similar designs.

The munitions were encased in a metal shell.

High Britannia's cannons had to load the cannonball, gunpowder and primer

separately, but the «40 Allen cannon» combined all these components.

With fewer steps involved, loading was faster.

However, the downside was the shells being too heavy. One shell weighed as much as 100Lv (50kg).

But the Belgarian artillery soldiers picked them up easily.

They fired again.

The earth was shaking and the air vibrates.

Unlike the spherical shape of the old model, the projectile was elongated like a bullet. This allowed the lump of metal to travel faster than the speed of sound.

The boulders and trees covering the slope—

Were shattered!

The soldiers from the Belgaria Empire cheered loudly.

What awaited the Hispania Empire soldiers who were spreading out for their charge, was a battlefield that had changed drastically, where most of the cover had been blown to pieces.

And countless rifle reports.

The spread out soldiers either continued to charge or fled in a panic without a strong chain of command.

By the time the enemy commander ordered a general retreat, the 30,000 enemies had dropped sharply to 20,000.

Countless corpses laid on the drastically changed terrain.

Regis shivered.

"... As expected, rifles are terrifying."

"That's right."

"... In past wars, most soldiers who couldn't fight anymore were wounded, and could at least return to their homes alive."

"But war has changed because of rifles."

"... Yes."

His heart was aching.

"But we can't stop here. Right, Regis?"

"... That's right. No matter how great our aspiration might be, it is all dream talk if we can't win the fight before us."

Altina nodded.

She thrust her sword forward.

"All units, advance!"

End of Volume 13



覇創の皇姫
アルティナⅩⅢ

読んでくださってありがとうございます☺

むらさきさん、相当の和田さん、
今回も大変楽しませていただきました。
ありがとうございます。

Y
Daisy

前回から登場のようじょ枠
し/わーしちゃんを描きました。